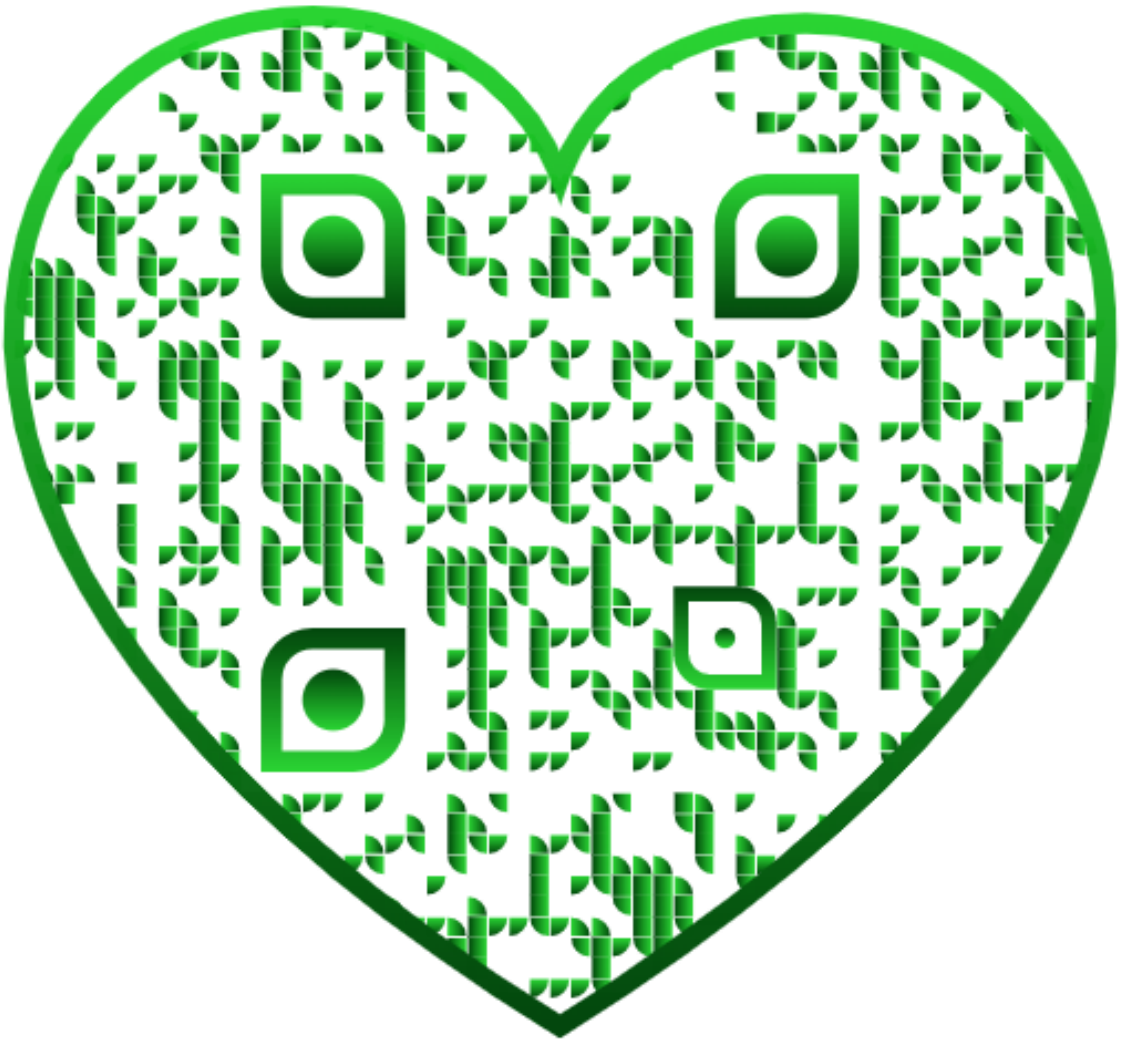
METAL HAMMER

AMON AMARTH

WANT METAL'S THRONE

FUTURE
ISSUE 322



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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9060

ISSN 0955-1190

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AS METAL AS IT GETS

IT'S AS SIMPLE as that. Towering, melodic death metal anthems about Vikings? Sung by guys that look like Vikings? Which, pulled together on stage alongside a giant boat, inflatable dragons and walls of fire, looks like something out of hit TV show (you guessed it), *Vikings*? Few bands of the past 20 years have been taken as instantly and proudly to the hearts of metalheads around the world as Amon Amarth, so to welcome them back to the cover of *Metal Hammer*, we knew we had to do something special. Just check out that cover shot. We suspect Johan Hegg didn't have to get too far out of character for that one.

It's not just about swishing swords and chugging mead, though. There's something intrinsic about what Amon Amarth do that just resonates with metal lovers; an earnestness and deep-rooted belief in their craft that carries through everything they put their name to. They've earned their seat at the table, and as Dave Everley's brilliant interview on page 38 shows, they're ready to take their swing at the big time. After all, metal loves an underdog. Why the fuck shouldn't a bunch of Swedish death metallers singing about Vikings be one of the biggest bands in the world?

HORNS UP!

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MEET THE BAND

ALICE PATTILLO
ONLINE EDITOR
Five years after she first interned here at *Hammer* HQ and then became one of our trusty freelancers, Alice joins the team full-time as our brand new Online Editor. Which means she's now in charge of all you lot on our Facebook page. God speed.

MATT MILLS
WRITER
Having been part of Team *Hammer* for more than two years, Matt has become one of Southampton's premier metal ambassadors. This month, he's looking further afield courtesy of a Slaylist with Phil Bozeman, of Knoxville crushers Whitechapel. How tropical.

STEVE BROWN
PHOTOGRAPHER
When Steve's behind the lens, you know things are about to get cinematic, and rarely more so than this month's thunderously epic cover shot with Johan Hegg from Amon Amarth. We had to bring the fur coat ourselves, though (no, really).

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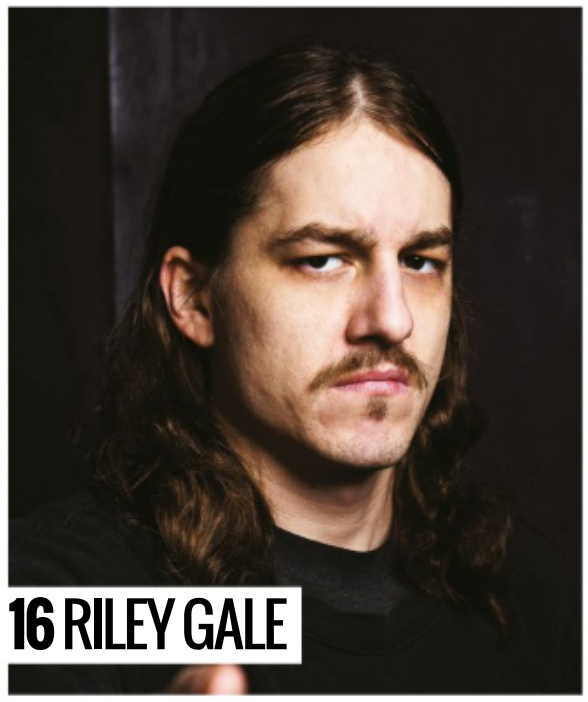

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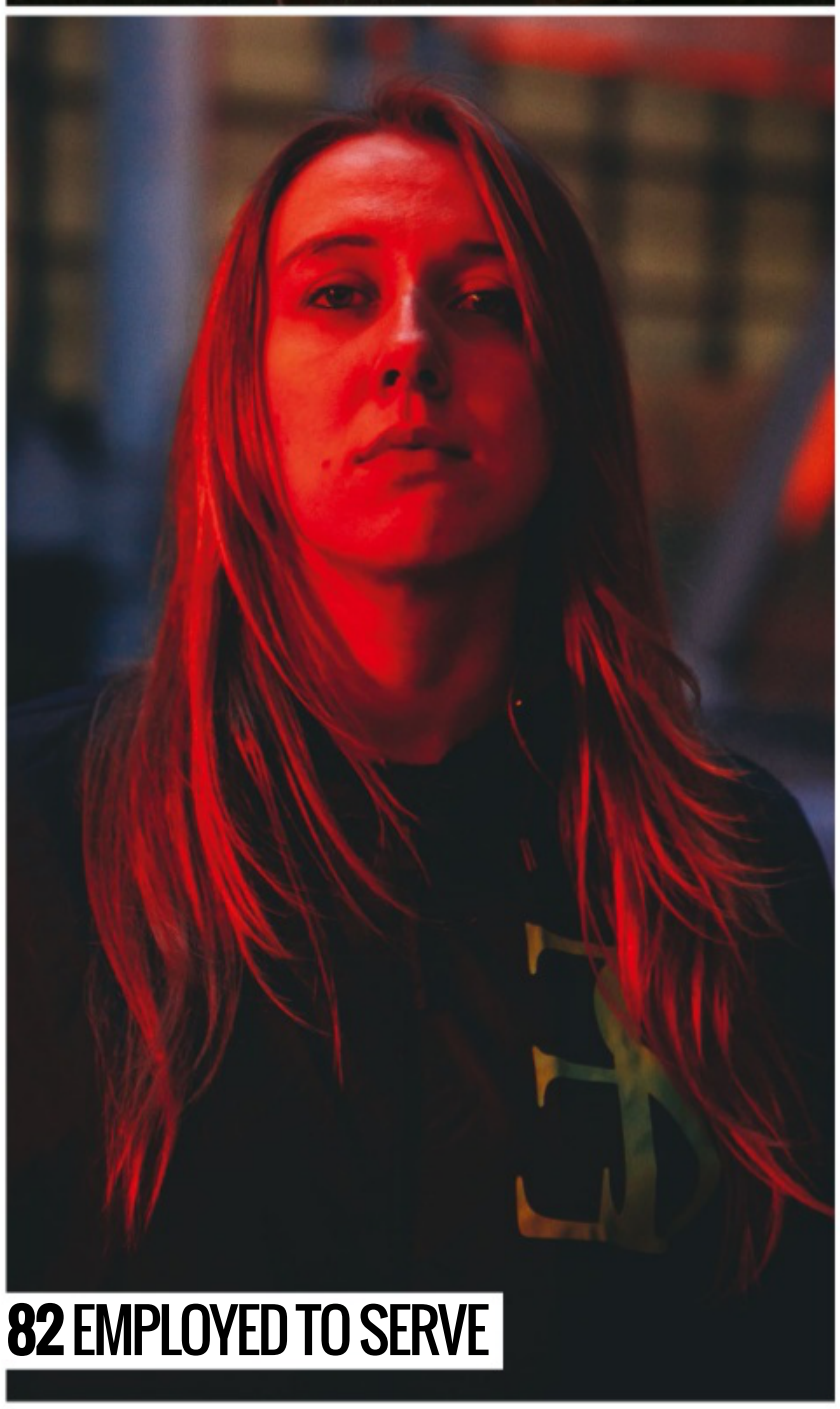

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16 Wanna live like **POWER TRIP**'s **RILEY GALE**? Step this way...
20 We hit the studio with **ABBATH**, now on his second solo record.
22 A taxidermy tiger helped **PAPA ROACH** write *...To Be Loved*.
30 Introducing Tunisia's biggest metal band, **MYRATH**, approved by Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant, no less.

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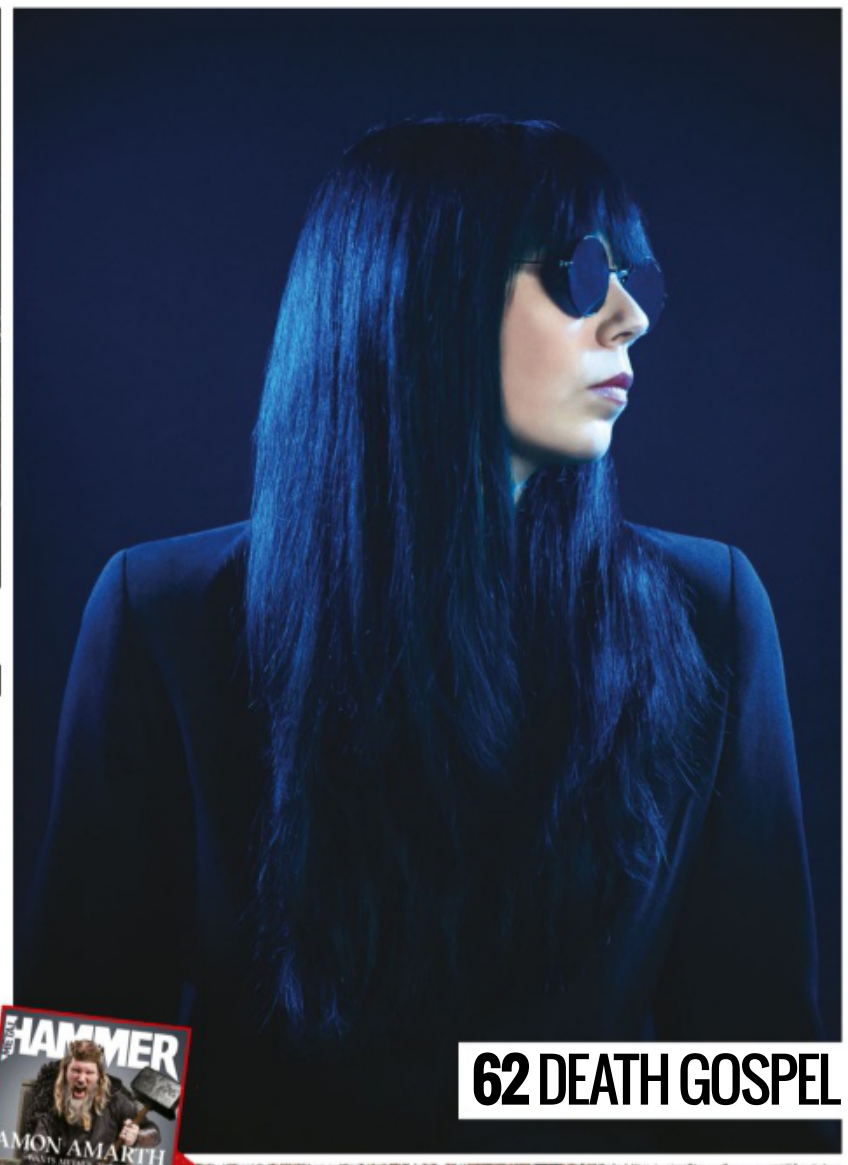

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74 INTER ARMA

112 WMC

70000 TONS OF METAL
#70000 TONS
Pool

THE BIG PICTURE

WE'RE ON A BOAT (MOTHERFUCKER)

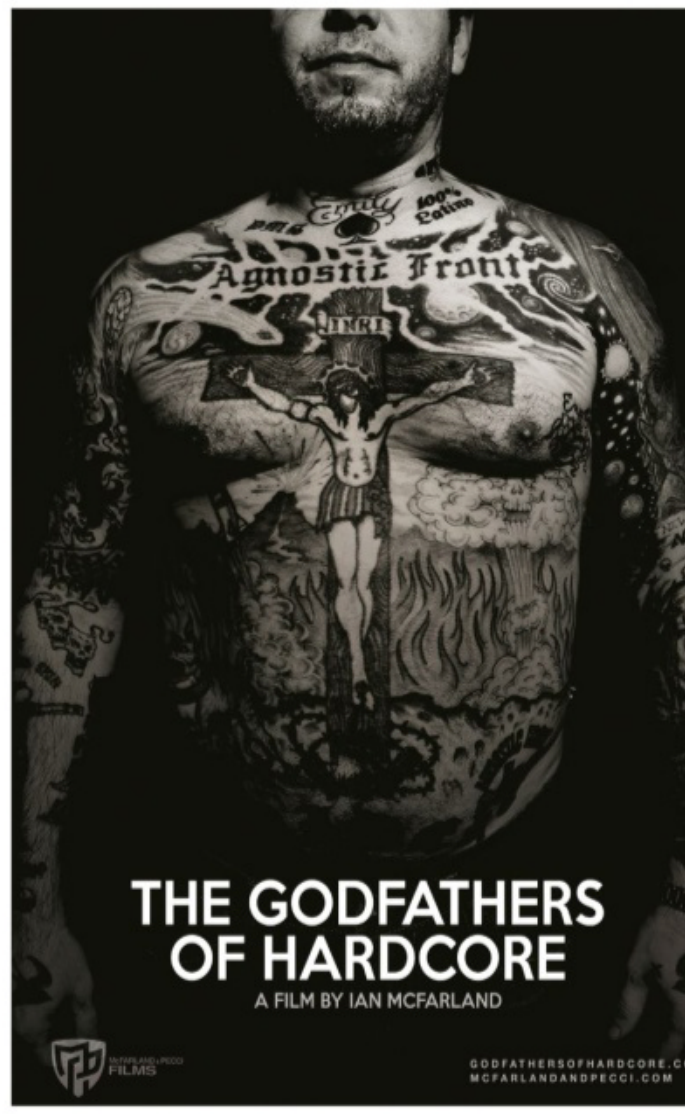
A STAPLE PART of the heavy metal calendar for eight years now, the 70,000 Tons Of Metal cruise recently travelled from Fort Lauderdale, Florida to Labadee, Haiti and back. Carrying more than 50 bands and a few thousand delirious metalheads, it was another week of absolute lunacy. Where else would you get Max Cavalera and that annoying mascot from Nekrogoblikon rubbing shoulders with dive-bombing hairy blokes in mankinis? Quite honestly, where else would you *want* that? Head to www.metalhammer.com for more photos of one of the funnest (and daftest) few days of the year.

THE HOT TOPIC

NEW YORK GIANTS

We chat to director Ian McFarland about his highly anticipated new documentary on hardcore pioneers Agnostic Front

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL



THERE HAVE BEEN a raft of exceptional metal, punk and hardcore documentaries over the years, but perhaps none as personal and revealing as Showtime's *The Godfathers Of Hardcore* – a brand new film from director Ian McFarland that tells the story of legendary NYHC veterans, Agnostic Front. "I've been friends with these guys for many years," Ian tells us when asked about the initial inspiration for the film. "My band has toured with them, I've directed a bunch of their music videos, so I was around them a lot, and I saw a really unique friendship between Roger [Miret, vocalist] and Vinnie [Stigma, guitar] that was very hard to put into words. You really need to see it to understand it. I wanted to do something more than a 'band DVD'; I wanted to do a portrait, to capture this rich history and this Yin and Yang relationship that made the band work. If I hadn't taken this opportunity and someone else had, then it would have driven me mad, and I'm glad I did because it's been a hell of ride."

The result is a film that not only touches on the huge influence that Agnostic Front have had on the world of hardcore, but offers a revealing look at two of its most recognisable characters, and the toll that years of gruelling touring can take on the health of an underground musician. "There's a point where everything goes from a happening story to a cautionary tale," says Ian. "I wanted to capture Roger and Vinnie, and I told these guys, 'I need to do this while you are still alive.' They're not teenagers any more! Not to do a spoiler, but the health issues that come up in Roger's case, I had to get this done as fast as I could because I wanted Roger to be able to see it."

"THIS BECAME A CAUTIONARY TALE"

IT'S ALSO A CHANCE for longtime fans to experience the whirlwind of positivity that is guitarist Vinnie Stigma up close and in the flesh. "With Vinnie, you just turn the camera on and let it go," laughs Ian. "We went and just stayed with him for a week and followed him around, and one of the biggest problems we had in filming was trying not to laugh when Vinnie was in full flow. My sound guy kept complaining that all he could hear was us cracking up. He's a guy that just lives life with full positivity."

With *The Godfathers Of Hardcore* picking up plenty of praise in film festivals around the world, including DocNYC and Raindance, it could also expose the world of punk rock to an audience that had previously never even known it existed. It could even give the mainstream world a proper opportunity to witness our scene in a positive light – something that Ian is clearly immensely proud to have been able to instigate.

"It's pulled the veil back on that world for people," Ian smiles. "If you go back and look at the kickstarter campaign for the film, then I think I've done what I set out to do. Back then I was very clear to say that I wanted to do a film that Roger Miret deserves, a film that Vinnie Stigma deserves, and I wanted to do something that would have the appeal for a mainstream audience whilst still having the support of the scene and the people that are in that type of music. There's nothing worse than having your culture misrepresented, and there are some great movies out there, but I wanted to do something a little different, and I think I succeeded." H

***THE GODFATHERS OF HARDCORE* IS AVAILABLE TO WATCH VIA SKY THIS MONTH**

Ian McFarland in his other life as bassist in hardcore band Blood For Blood

Agnostic Front: hardcore legends and cautionary tale

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

JOHAN HEGG LOVED OUR COVER SHOOT WAY TOO MUCH
Seriously, he was far too comfortable swinging that big hammer about.

DEATH METAL IS HAPPY MUSIC
According to a recent study by an Australian university, death metal brings "power, joy and peace" to all who consume it. We agree.

FESTIVAL SEASON KICKS OFF NEXT MONTH
First up: All Points East with one of the summer's more eclectic line-ups.

Architects are playing All Points East. Yassss!

METAL'S LEGENDS AREN'T DONE YET
Metallica and Judas Priest both working on new music? We're all the way in on that. Like, up to our elbows in that shit.

WWE HAVE DONE METAL T-SHIRTS
And we love them. Even if we think that Bray Wyatt is more of a Sabbath man than Braun.

MACHINE HEAD ARE NOSTALGIC
Burn My Eyes in full? Yes, please. Then maybe a new album, Robb?

WE NEED MORE ANNIVERSARY TOURS
Come on, how many classic albums turn 25 this year? Let's have it.

SLIPKNOT'S ALBUM IS COMING
On August 9, to be precise. Be still, our putrid, maggot-infested hearts.

PEOPLE LIKE *THE DIRT*
In this day and age, it could have gone either way. But you guys are loving Netflix's debauched Crüe film.

BABYMETAL ARE A DUO
Their new photo came out on April 1, AKA Fox Day. We still miss Yuimetal.

WWE: well metal

DO PEOPLE MAKE MONKEY NOISES AT YOU?

…and a whole heap of other issues Disturbed's David Draiman had to tackle when faced with your burning questions

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

IN OUR COVER feature with Disturbed last year, David Draiman talked about the rough time he's had from the press over the years. With the US metal monoliths heading back to the UK next month, we thought we'd give you lot the chance to grill him instead. Would the good people of the *Hammer* readership give our Dave safe passage?

Did you get any feedback from Simon & Garfunkel after *The Sound Of Silence*?
Ken Johnson, Twitter
"When we were a week or so our from our live performance of *The Sound Of Silence* on *Conan*, our manager contacted me and asked if it was alright for him to give my email address to Paul Simon's manager. He had expressed an interest in contacting me. I said of course he could and then waited like a nervous child. He wrote: 'David, really powerful performance on *Conan* the other day. First time I'd seen you do it live. Nice. Thanks. Paul.' We were a few hours away from performing when I got the email, and I ran around backstage to anyone who'd care to look at Paul's praise! He liked it so much that he talked about it repeatedly in interviews and even put our *Conan* performance on his own social media pages!"

What's your favourite album?
@TimmyPPG, Twitter
"*Ride the Lightning*. I'd never heard such complexity, power, depth, ferocity and beauty melded together before. *Fade To Black* is perhaps my favourite Metallica song. It's such a truly epic record."

Are there any other unexpected artists you'd like Disturbed to cover?
Janine Opie, Facebook
"We don't premeditate when it comes to choosing covers – we leave choosing them for the last part of the recording process each time we go in the studio. The covers are fun for us. They're a different challenge each time. How to keep the integrity of the original song but still make it your own? Not planning ahead when it comes to our selection is part of the challenge and fun of it."

"Right, that's it. No more baked beans on the rider, lads"

What's your favourite part of touring? Any bands you wanna tour with?
@MetalheadMarv
"It's always all about the show. We are truly addicted to the live experience… all of us. Everything else is just travel and coming up with ways to keep yourself sane or pass the time until the next show. We'd still love to do a proper tour with Metallica or Iron Maiden one day. Tool and Rammstein are on the wishlist as well. Foo Fighters, too!"

How can metal bands break the mainstream in 2019?
Kenner Smith, Facebook
"I truly wish I knew. There is no 'secret' to success. Not now, nor was there ever. No magical equation that if you follow to a T, will ensure that you get your big break. All any musician can do, in any era, is write the best songs they possibly can, and play them with all of their hearts and souls every time they take the stage. Promote your asses off, don't be lazy, don't expect anyone to

"Aliens? Don't even think about landing here..."

hand anything to you. Take it seriously, perfect your craft. Learn to navigate the waters you are hoping to sail in by aligning yourself with trustworthy, wise individuals who can not only help guide you to the promised land, but you can learn from along the way. Bust your asses, and with determination, talent, wisdom and a whole shit-ton of luck, you might just make it."

What's your favourite song from your new album, *Evolution*?
@LYTBand, Twitter
"The songs are like children to us, so it's difficult to have true 'favourites' per se. Each song on this record speaks about subject matter that's close to our hearts. If I was forced to show favouritism, I suppose *A Reason To Fight, Hold On To Memories, Are You Ready, The Best Ones Lie* and *No More* would be among those favoured just a bit more than the rest."

Do you get people making monkey noises at you in the street?
Alex Holaifa, email
"More often than you might think, to be honest. One of my favourites was when I was at a mall somewhere on tour, and this little boy, couldn't have been more than three or four years old, ran up to me, wrapped his arms and legs around my leg, looked up at me and shouted, *'Ooh wah ah ah ah!'* I was *dying* laughing, it was so sweet. His parents came running up, apologising to me, which I told them was absolutely unnecessary. I took pictures with them and thanked them."

If an alien came down to Earth what three things would you show him to explain the human race?
Jackie Warren, Facebook
"I'd show them Twitter, and I'd hope they'd do the wise thing at that point. Leave us in our misery and travel back to their home world as fast as possible."

Best advice you can give to all the aspiring musicians out there who want a career in the music industry?
@rocknroro, Twitter
"Try finding another profession. Ha ha! Seriously though, it's as tough as it's ever been. Competition is everywhere, and the internet barrages the consumer with stimuli. It's information overload. Technology has made it easier for musicians to get their music to people, but because of the ease of its pathway, there are more people doing it than ever. If you're going to give it a try, be prepared to give it all you've got. To risk sacrificing everything else, because sometimes, that's what it takes."

"THERE WERE 15 SHARKS IN A FEEDING FRENZY"

Rock is dead? Don't think so, mate

If you weren't fronting Disturbed what would you be doing with your life right now?
Jenna Gardner, email
"I'd probably still be a Health Care Administrator. I worked as one for about six years prior to getting signed. It was a heartbreaking job at times, getting close to people you are caring for only to see them leave the world too soon every time. Families taking advantage of their loved ones, stealing from them or defrauding them, neglectful or even abusive nurses and aides, and trying to make a profitable business from managing people's health. It was rewarding helping everyone I could, but depressing at the same time."

What do you say to those people who claim that "rock is dead"?
@RockMetalMLover, Twitter
"Nonsense. We just finished our most successful arena run of our careers here in the USA on the first leg of our Evolution tour. Shinedown, Five Finger Death Punch and many others are either doing or coming off of successful arena runs themselves. The biggest festivals in the world are dominated by rock bands, and Metallica, Iron Maiden, AC/DC and Guns N' Roses are still selling out stadiums. Newer bands like Nothing More, Greta Van Fleet, Bring Me The Horizon, The 1975, The Struts, and others are very strong representatives of a new generation of rock that have massive fan bases which are growing with each passing day. Dead? To whom?"

If you could have experimented with another genre and get away with it what would your sound be?
@drum_by, Twitter
"I think we just did on *Evolution*. I'm not sure what 'genre' some of our new material falls into, but it certainly isn't stereotypically Disturbed. Call it a more classic rock feel, or balladry, but it was definitely experimentation, and I couldn't be happier that we did."

I heard you love snorkelling. What's the best fish?
Bryan Austin, Facebook
"I'm an avid scuba diver – I've been on over 450 dives – and one of the perks of travelling the world on tour is being able to set aside the time to dive in some of the most amazing places in the world. The Maldives, the Great Barrier Reef, the Red Sea, all over the Caribbean, Hawaii, Fiji, to name a few. As far as underwater life is concerned, the bigger the better for me. I love encountering large pelagic life, and I *love* sharks. Some of the most spectacular dives I've been privileged to go on were open water shark dives. I just did one not too long ago in Fiji at about 80+ft with 10–15 bull sharks in a feeding frenzy! It was amazing!"

***EVOLUTION* IS OUT NOW VIA WMG. DISTURBED TOUR THE UK NEXT MONTH - SEE P.109**

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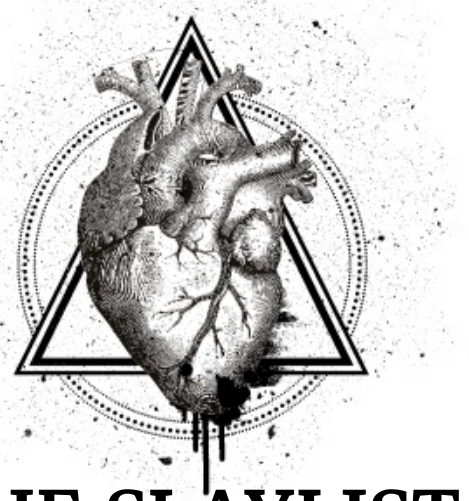

THE SLAYLIST

PHIL BOZEMAN

Whitechapel's singer digs hip hop's swagger and death metal's heaviness. He should start a deathcore band…

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Phil Bozeman: now old enough to buy all the sonic filth his heart desires

METALLICA'S *ENTER SANDMAN* was basically the first metal song I ever heard. To a seven-year-old, that opening riff is very haunting and unsettling. Then, when the guitars really kick in, it's scary as a young kid, but it's also very exciting. That song just made me feel like a badass! It's such a classic at this point and the *Black Album* is by far the heaviest album that they ever did. So I had an infatuation with dark-sounding stuff at a young age and I was introduced to **THREE 6 MAFIA**. I have three older sisters and they would have boyfriends come over. Every single one of them listened to rap. *Late Nite Tip* was a very dark song to listen to, but I loved that unsettling feeling. That piano piece at the very beginning was haunting. I first heard *Thuggish Ruggish Bone* at one of my sisters' basketball games, too. That was **BONE THUGS-N-HARMONY**'s big hit back in the day. They had that fast rap style that I connected with. I asked, 'How do they do this?!' They were just an intimidating group to me. That whole era was just the best time for rap music.

"The first place I heard *Hammer Smashed Face* was in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*. At the time, I didn't know what the song was called or who **CANNIBAL CORPSE** were; my cousin ended up telling me. I went to the record store only to find out that I couldn't purchase the eight-track tape or the CD because I was, like, 10. I don't know what it was, but *Hammer…* blew me away. It was the scariest and coolest thing I'd ever heard. **EXHUMED** drew me deeper into the more gory side of death metal. Ross Sewage [bass and vocals] is the guy that made me want to do guttural vocals. I wanted to imitate him because I just loved the way he sounded. *Casketkrusher*, in general, is just so aggressive! It's so aggressive, so fast, in your face and then done, out of nowhere. But, to me, **MESHUGGAH** are the heaviest band to ever exist; I don't think anyone is going to top them. *Stengah*'s opening riff – you just know something's coming. Then it comes in and it's just pure destruction. The riff comes back later as a break and, the way it's written, it just hits you every single time. I can get a pissed-off look on my face and just constantly bang my head.

"I was in seventh grade the first time I heard **SLIPKNOT**'s *[sic]* in the late 90s. The *Slipknot* album cover, to a younger kid, was terrifying! It was just nine dudes in masks, plus the music was ridiculous. It was super-heavy, super-aggressive and the whole imagery of the band really sells the music. They're gonna go down as one of the greatest bands in history just based on the shows and how they look. It's hard to take **LIMP BIZKIT** seriously as an adult but, around that same time, *Nookie* was a huge deal. That opening riff was like an acid trip! It was hip hop dudes doing metal and back then it was cool. Wes Borland [guitars] looked like an alien and Fred Durst [vocals] was rapping over this heavy, groovy music. You still can't hate them, though, because it's just fun! After that, I transferred from metal to punk, then went back and forth. As crazy and wild as they are, **NOFX** became one of my favourite punk rock bands because of how talented they are. *The Decline* is an 18-minute song. It was just an epic track! It had every aspect of NOFX but also aspects of other genres of music in it.

"Our new album has been compared to **TOOL** and I would be lying if I said I wasn't influenced by Maynard [James Keenan, vocals]. The beginning of *The Patient* is so droning and I feel haunted by it. I get chills every time it comes on. The guitar riff at the beginning is one of the most simple things to play, yet I love it so much. Anything that they've ever done is just genius!" MH

LISTEN NOW
Listen to Phil's mix now at tinyurl.com/PhilSlaylist

"IT'S HARD TO TAKE LIMP BIZKIT SERIOUSLY"

WHITECHAPEL'S NEW ALBUM, *THE VALLEY*, IS OUT NOW VIA METAL BLADE.
THE BAND WILL PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL AND TWO UK SHOWS IN JUNE – SEE LIVE EVIL ON P.109

PRESS

SCOTT IAN, JOE TROHMAN, KEITH BUCKLEY, DAN ANDRIANO, ANDY HURLEY

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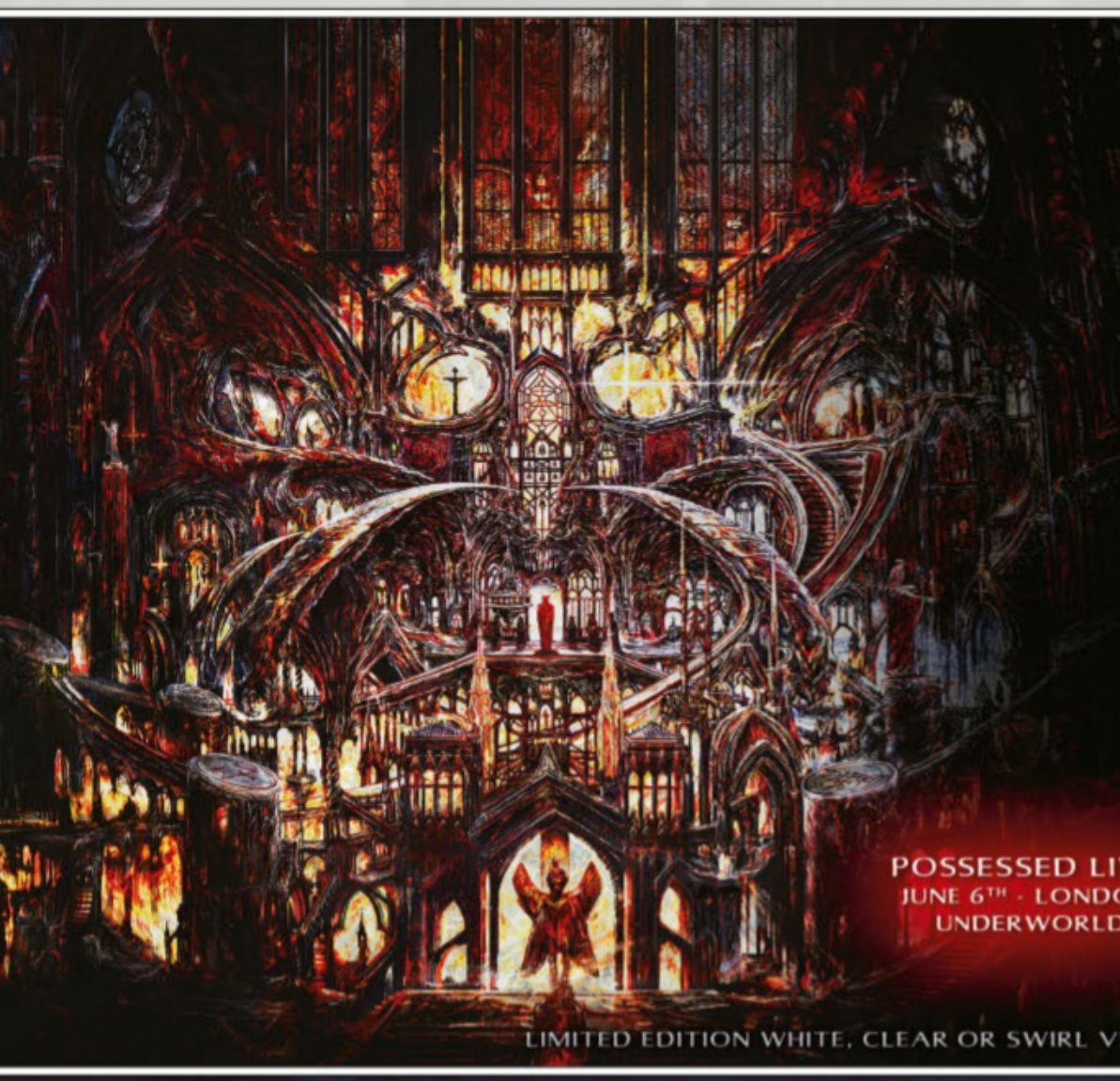

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RILEY GALE

He fronts Texan thrashers Power Trip and would slap a Nazi if he had to, but don't expect Riley to get too bummed about The End.

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE • PICTURES: WILL IRELAND

METAL IS SMARTER THAN MANY PEOPLE THINK

"[There's a common misconception] that there isn't something to be learned from it, that it's not a genre taken seriously – it's just a lot of theatrics and showing off or being 'scary'. The masses view it as a novelty, they think there isn't any added value to society at large, and I disagree with that. There's material there to write intense metal songs but still say something bigger about humanity or modern topics. There's ways to present stuff that is catchy, but then for the people who wanna think deeper about it, there's substance there to be dug up. I think that's entirely impossible to do things that way."

BANDS NEED TO BE THEMSELVES

"It's hard to be a successful band and not have to commit yourself to some kind of image or gimmick, and that's what we try to do to. I would say our brothers in Turnstile inspire us in that way. They just have this energy that is so accepting and so loving, which I think is something that the world desperately lacks right now. They have such a positive way of approaching music and their fanbase, and they are very inclusive, you know? I don't think that there's mystique around the band, they're very much themselves, so I really look up to that. I am proud of us for trying to do the same thing, but I see them as a band that's done that as well. They've maintained their individuality, and that's something I admire."

GREAT ART DOES COME FROM GREAT STRUGGLE

"It allows you to look at things a certain way. When you suffer, you're allowed to start to understand that other people suffer too, and I think it makes you less judgemental. That way you can express yourself in a way that, hopefully, connects with other people. Ultimately, I think that most artists would say they wanna connect with people. Even artists that try and do 'anti-art' or really nihilistic stuff, no matter what, they're still looking for people to see that and connect with it. Whether we're talking about physical or sculpture or painting or music or visual… whatever you put out into the world, you're looking for people to connect with it."

AMERICA'S GUNS ISSUE IS A BIG PROBLEM

"I think it's really simple. Just taking a better look at who is buying our guns. A right to own a gun is a really dangerous amendment to have in a constitution. I don't think that people with violent history [should] have a right to own a gun. I don't think people use our fourth amendment the way our forefathers intended. I don't think they anticipated us having weapons that are as sophisticated as we do. It's as simple as saying, 'There's a limit to what you can have,' you know? And it's easy to do a background check. It's easier to get a gun as an ex-felon than it is to get a job!"

'LEFT' AND 'RIGHT' IS A STUPID WAY TO LOOK AT POLITICS

"It's just making things black and white, and that's not the way the world operates. It's not even black, white and grey. It's hard for people to grasp that it's a whole spectrum of colours – and that's not some hippie fucking energy bullshit! People only wanna see it one way or the other, or some people are able to say, 'Ah, it's in between,' but really, it's a *million* different things, a million perspectives. Reality as someone sees it, and how the masses perceive it and all this stuff, it's all a very rich tapestry of what people have gone through in their lives to reach that viewpoint and to do all these things, so I think calling it 'left' and 'right' is so simplistic. I mean, you're basically saying that our political spectrum should be easier than a standardised test that has four options, right? Like, really? Everything about our political system is just a true or false answer? 'The left is true, the right is false'? It's just really simple-minded to me. It's absolutely ridiculous."

"IT'S EASIER TO GET A GUN THAN A JOB"

IT'S OK TO PUNCH NAZIS… SOMETIMES

"If what that person is saying means that, ultimately, somewhere down the line, some kind of political violence is going to be implemented upon another person, a marginalised person, then fuck yeah, you can punch them. It's a pre-emptive strike. If people on the right wanna get all pissy about that, well, we did that to fucking Iraq when it came to 9/11. We put a pre-emptive strike on a country that hadn't provoked us, and we sat there and said, 'We did this to look out for a greater threat that was coming.' Well, you know what? I see white nationalism as that threat. So if you've got someone sitting there saying, 'It makes perfect sense to separate children from their families because we think they're in some grand conspiracy to undermine and destabilise the country'… get the fuck out of here. Punch that motherfucker. Because what they're ultimately saying is that these people should be separated, they should be manhandled, they should have their rights stripped away. That ultimately leads to some kind of physical violence happening to somebody."

HEARING YOUR OWN MUSIC ON A WWE SHOW IS COOL

"I think WWE is a great thing. It brings a lot of different people from different cultures together. It has a very wide demographic, a wide range of people who are into it. It's something that, now that you have all this connectivity with the internet, all these communities are starting to pop up. It's cool! It's fascinating to watch, and I think it mirrors a lot of what's going on in music now. These guys are artists in themselves. I respect it as an art, so getting asked to be used [in an NXT show], that was cool."

THERE'S NO POINT BEING SAD ABOUT DEATH

"Death doesn't hit me very hard. I internalise it a lot. I sort of think it's a relief. I think that when you die, you die. You have your borrowed time, and no amount of grieving is gonna bring anyone back. I believe the burden of life being taken off somebody is nice. Whatever is happening, even if it's nothing at all, is better than life, I guess. That's really negative-sounding, but it's not

Riley Gale wants YOU... to embrace the thrash tash

"PUNCHING NAZIS IS A PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE. WHITE NATIONALISM IS A THREAT"

negative; it's actually very freeing to think about! You got this life, go for whatever you wanna go for. Go for your biggest dreams, and if you fail, become a fucking drunk. Be a bum in the street and piss yourself, because who cares? There's so many people in this world, and everything moves so fast, who cares about trying to make history anyway? You might as well just live your life the way you want to."

THE NEWS IS NUTS

"I pick CNN and Fox News, and I see truth coming out on the 'left' side, but the way they present it is just so over the top. They act like anything is some huge bombshell, and it's like, 'No, OK, this is another breadcrumb that we add to another trail.' Everything is so exasperated and overblown, and on the right it's the same thing. I feel like there's a lot less truth presented there, and that is my 'left-leaning' bias, but I think both sides are victimising, and it's so ridiculous."

SOCIETY NEEDS TO GET ITS PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

"No one is arguing deep economics. We're arguing social issues all the time. That is insane. All this racism and homophobia, and arguing over genders… who gives a goddamn fuck? Someone being themselves, being who they wanna be, isn't a violent thing, unless that person wants to inflict violence on other people. But when it comes to their sex, whether they're a man or woman, how they wanna present themselves, it really doesn't make a fuck to me. It don't make a *fuck*!"

I DON'T THINK OF MYSELF AS A CONFIDENT FRONTMAN

"I just try to have fun and be myself, and when it's to bigger crowds and I can have fun with them, I'll say sillier stuff. I like a good gag. When I'm in places where I feel like I have a lot more friends in the room, it can be a relaxing thing. So it's not confidence, it's comfort!"

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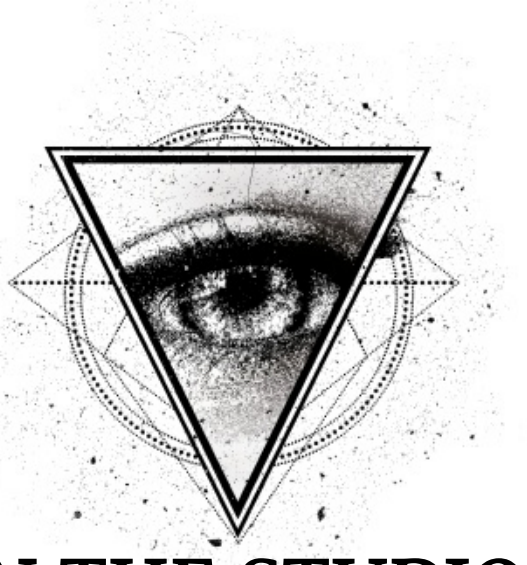


IN THE STUDIO

ABBATH

Extreme metal's most iconic frontman is almost ready to release his next solo outing

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURES: ENDRE KIRKESOLA

Dude, you missed

HAVING SHAKEN THE metal world with his departure from Immortal back in 2015, the distinctive – and regularly memed – frontman Abbath proved there was still fire, and ice, in his belly with the release of his debut, self-titled solo album a year later. Now he's making a swift return with the follow-up, *Outstrider*, but minus his former right-hand man, bassist King Ov Hell. We caught up with the man himself to discover what to expect from his second salvo…

You've worked with a new producer, Endre Kirkesola, rather than Daniel Bergström this time around. Why?
"I've wanted to record an album with Endre for some time. He did the sound for Immortal live, and he's a hell of a guy. He's such a nerd, he's like, 'Oh, I've found the same frequency for the guitars on *Ride The Lightning*!' He studies everything. With the first album, we weren't in the studio with Daniel when he was mixing it, and it suffered for that. Our fault, not his. We sent Endre the demos and he was super-prepared. It's been a very comfortable process this time – not so much drama."

There's been one major change in that you're working without King this time. What happened?
"It's always a long story when it comes to King. He was one hell of a support. He also has his own thing with Ov Hell, and it became a lot of drama – I won't go into details, but there was a lot of stress. He definitely has his own signature when it comes to the music, and he's a great musician. Working with him was great when it was great and it sucked when it wasn't! But I wish him all the best, he's doing fine. I don't have to hear anything from him!"

It's a heavier, more in-your-face album than the debut. Was that always the intention?
"You better believe it. Heavy has always been what I've searched for in my music, no matter what. But it's just a natural development; you don't plan everything too much, but you kind of have the blueprint and you just move on with it. *Harvest Pyre* is a continuance of *Winterbane* [from the *Abbath* album]. You have to burn the past and arise from the ashes. We recently made a video for it and we built a huge pyre. I also had a big Abbath logo made in metal like W.A.S.P. did, which we're going to bring on tour with us."

What can you tell us about the new drummer and bassist on *Outstrider*?
"Ukri [Suvilehto] is a young guy from Finland who did the Russian tour with us and he's been amazing. We're still fortunate to have him. He's not the typical metal guy, but he's 25 years old, and one hell of a talent. Mia [Wallace], was the first person who asked for the new job as bass player after King. She was so dedicated, and she was the most qualified. We did our first show with her in Bangalore and she was spectacular. It feels balanced now, mature, but also… wow! We're all under the name Abbath, but it feels like a band now. That's what I wanted always. Team is everything, it's the mandatory paramount!"

The album ends with a cover of Bathory's *Pace Till Death*. Why that particular track?
"I chose that one because it fit, and also because it's a personal thing. It's about speed overdose, and because I'm a motorhead… if you know what I mean, ha ha ha!"

THE FACTS

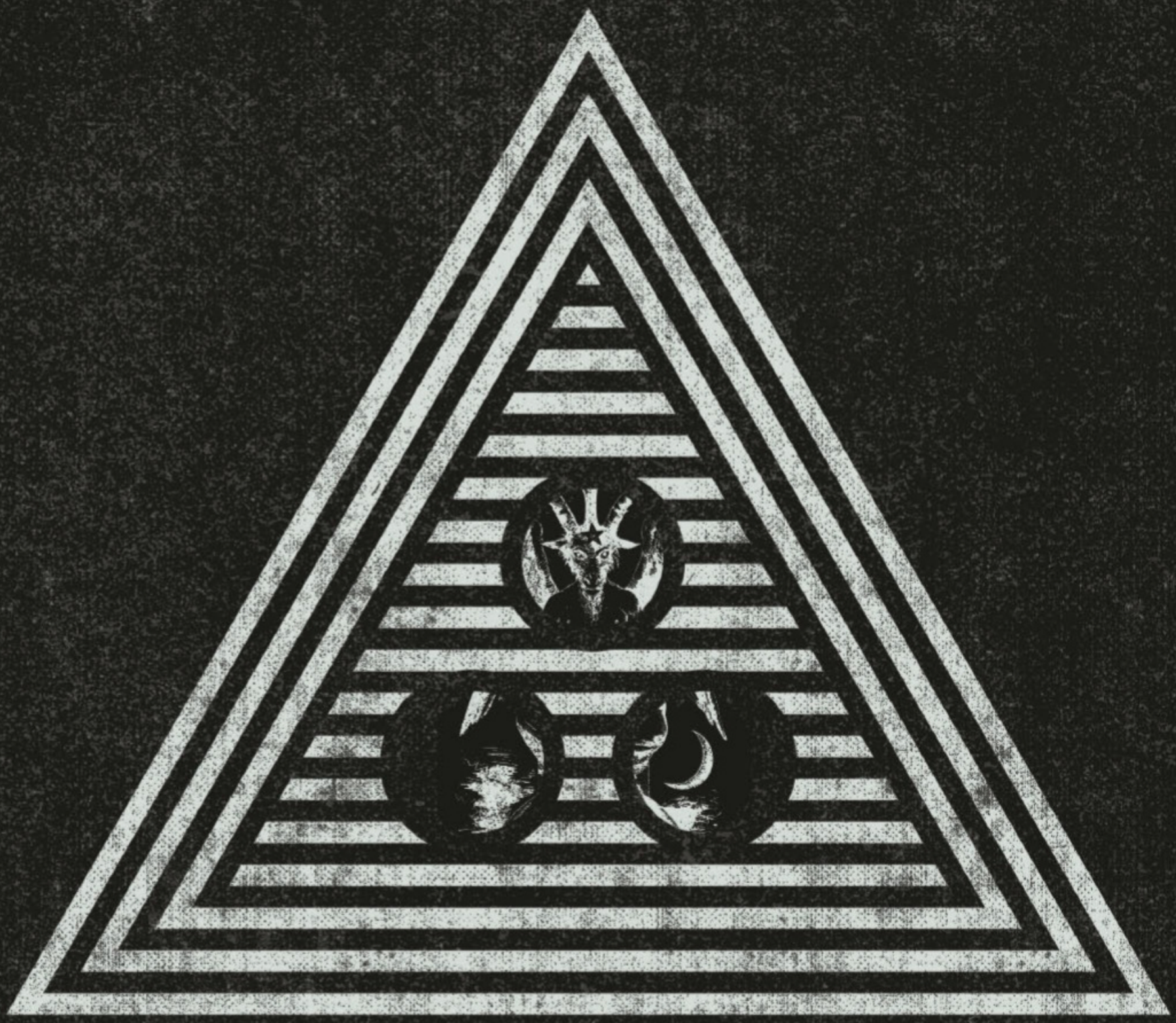
ALBUM:
2

PRODUCER:
Endre Kirkesola

STUDIO:
Dub Studios, Norway

EXPECT:
A fiercer take on the frostbitten sound. Marginally less expansive than the debut album, it ratchets up the intensity

***OUTSTRIDER* IS OUT JULY 5 VIA SEASON OF MIST**



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...TO BE LOVED BY PAPA ROACH

Nu metal was out. Eye liner and rock'n'roll bangers were in. Here's how Papa Roach took the left turn that would keep their career on track

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

BY THE END of 2003, the writing was on the wall for nu metal. That summer, Limp Bizkit had been chased offstage at a Metallica gig in Chicago by a hostile crowd chanting "Fuck Fred Durst!" A few months later, they'd struggled to replicate the success of 2000's *Chocolate Starfish And The Hot Dog Flavored Water* with its Wes Borland-less follow-up, *Results May Vary*. Pioneers Korn had received a lukewarm reception with their sixth album, *Take A Look In The Mirror*, and one-hit wonders like Crazy Town, Soil and Adema had, erm, failed to get another hit. More astute bands, though, had read the signs. Like Deftones and Slipknot, who'd jumped ship years before, Papa Roach had also clocked the finite nature of the genre's jock strap posturing. Aware they would need to mix up their formula to survive the inevitable, steadily approaching nu metal cliff-drop, the band had already started putting in the groundwork, embracing a harder rock edge on 2002's *Lovehatetragedy*. By 2004's *Getting Away With Murder*, they'd ditched the rapping, oversized Dickies and wallet chains completely, transitioning to a sound designed to ensure that when the end came, they would be clear of the debris. "To be honest, I didn't like 80% of the 'nu metal' bands," admits frontman Jacoby Shaddix. "I was like, 'This is fucking weak.' When we were dubbed nu metal, we hated it. We did everything we could to rebel against it. I didn't want to be compared to every other band and be stigmatised. I wanted to prove myself as a valid rock singer and *Getting Away With Murder* was a turning point for our band, especially with a song like [2004 soft rock ballad] *Scars*. You listen to that song and you don't think of nu metal. You think, 'Fuck that's a great song!'"

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
September 12, 2006

ALBUM:
The Paramour Sessions

PERSONNEL:
Jacoby Shaddix (vocals), Jerry Horton (guitar), Tobin Esperance (bass), Dave Buckner (drums)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
18 (US Billboard Hot 100)

Not everyone was convinced that there was life after nu metal; for one, the band's label, Geffen Records, was far from enamoured when Papa Roach turned in *Getting Away With Murder*. "DreamWorks Records got bought out so we went over to Universal and got pushed over to Geffen," Jacoby recalls. "The president of the company was not impressed with the album. He was like, 'I think this band's had its time and is essentially over.' We did not feel that way. We're always evolving – that's been something even before we put out [2000 breakthrough] *Infest*. We were like, 'We think we're sitting on an album that's amazing and you are using your preconceived notions about a dying genre and I'm not dying with the genre, period.'"

DESPITE THE MISGIVINGS of the label, *Getting Away With Murder* went on to sell 1.5 million copies: success that not only bought the band a vindicating degree of artistic freedom, but finally won them Geffen's full support. So much so that, when it came to writing and recording the next record, *The Paramour Sessions*, in December 2005, the label agreed to let them spend the next six months living in Los Angeles' Paramour Mansion. The band had wanted to create something dripping in rock'n'roll superfluity – and let's be fair, nothing screams "excess" more than a 15-bedroom, 15-bathroom residence atop the highest hill overlooking Los Angeles, in the celebrity neighbourhood of Silver Lake.

"At this point in our career we were just off to the races, anything goes, we weren't trapped," remembers Jacoby, grinning. "We said, 'Let's go live a fucking rock'n'roll dream in a crazy mansion,' but we didn't live out a fantasy, we lived out a fucking *reality*. The owner of the home had the coolest taste. There was a stuffed polar bear in one room, a fucking stuffed lion in another… a taxidermy tiger… all this antique furniture. Being in that type of

Papa Roach (left to right): Jerry Horton, Dave Buckner, Jacoby Shaddix, Tobin Esperance

space brought something new out of us. We just went nuts and recorded an over-the-top rock record."

At the time, Jacoby was listening to a ton of Queen and Mötley Crüe, which had manifested in both the band's music and his image. By the time the album was released, Papa Roach looked like a band reborn. Out were the sullen teens mired in angst. In was bollock-throttling leather and a *lot* of guyliner. They'd done the hard work by shaking off the nu metal tag, now they needed a song to secure the longevity of their sonic evolution… and they struck gold with *…To Be Loved*. During the Getting Away With Murder tour, Jacoby had been walking about backstage, singing a melody he'd cooked up months before as part of his warm-up. The rest of the band had latched onto the tune, keen to see if they could fit it onto a riff and with the hook already in place, it was one of the first tracks to be laid down at the Paramour Mansion. That snippet became *…To Be Loved*'s irrepressible chorus, packing that now-iconic, swelling, gang chant: *'WOOOAAAHHH, I never give in. WOOOAAAHHH, I never give up, WOOOAAAHHH, I never give in, and I just wanna be, wanna be loved.'*

"It just had that vibe, we knew it from the beginning," remembers Jacoby. "I remember jamming that song [at the Paramour Mansion], looking out this, I guess the window was at least 20 feet tall, over LA. We sent it to the record company and they were like, 'This could be huge.'"

"WE HATED BEING DUBBED NU METAL"

JACOBY SHADDIX

This time their label got it spot on; the song went balls-to-the-wall massive and it gave Papa Roach a new lease of life, firmly establishing them in a new age where emo and metalcore bands like My Chemical Romance and Killswitch Engage were the reigning kings. Granted, the album itself was a patchy affair, the product of a band still feeling their way around a new sound, but *…To Be Loved* was a moment where they resolutely nailed it. A shameless, glammed-up rock'n'roll banger, it positively burst with Papa Roach's now-trademark take-on-the-world exuberance. Of course, it's the chorus that everyone remembers, but the verses too pack a punch, all fighting talk wrapped up in glossy anthemia with Jacoby firing back at everyone who had ever doubted him and affirming you can never lose when you listen to your gut *'I gotta follow my heart,'* he sings. *'No matter how far. I gotta roll the dice. Never look back and never think twice.'* Even now, it's still one of the most triumphant hooks they've ever written.

AS RIP ROARING as the song is, though, it's the video that takes it to the next level, a revelation that was completely removed from anything we'd seen from Papa Roach before. Reflecting the exaggerated environment in which it was made, it has the band committing high sacrilege by turning a cavernous church into

GETTY

Jacoby just wants to be loved... even with that haircut

the kind of club even Rammstein wouldn't take their mothers to. The band are surrounded by partying, fire-breathing models and, in the middle of it all, Jacoby commands the altar, kitted out in leather and a shitload of hairspray while PVC-clad trapeze artists swing over his head. Not long after its release, the WWE picked up the song and for three years used it as the theme tune for flagship show *Monday Night Raw*. The exposure brought Papa Roach to brand new audiences and not long after that, along with Mastodon, they supported Iron Maiden on their 2007 Matter Of Life And Death tour. It gave the band the opportunity to find out just how successful their transformation had been, in front of the most exacting and intimidating of metal audiences.

"I was like, 'Fuck, Maiden fans… I don't know, man. Are they going to love or hate us?'" says Jacoby. "We get up there and we play *...To Be Loved* and instantly the crowd just goes apeshit crazy. I'm going, 'What?! I knew this song was a hit, but not this kind of hit. What's going on?'"

These days it seems we're perennially on the cusp of a nu metal revival and although Papa Roach will always be considered one of that genre's greatest exports, they've now shut down the critics who had them pegged as rap-rock also-rans. Undoubtedly, though, *...To Be Loved* was the song that set them on a path they're still on to this day, pushing their music in consistently new directions and confounding

"THE MANSION HAD STUFFED POLAR BEARS, LIONS AND TIGERS"

JACOBY SHADDIX

expectations. And as latest album *Who Do You Trust?* proves, despite returning to their rappy roots, the band have now transcended the scene that first carried them to recognition.

"It was definitely a pinnacle track for us," agrees Jacoby. "It was like us staking our claim again, like, 'We're still here, we're doing what we believe in and what we love.' Every song and record is a statement like that and that was another one of those moments in our career when we said, 'We're not going away, you can't get rid of us.'"

PAPA ROACH'S LATEST ALBUM, *WHO DO YOU TRUST?*, IS OUT NOW VIA ELEVEN SEVEN

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YOUR SHOUT

“AL JOURGENSEN LOOKS LIKE JOHNNY DEPP TOOK ACID”

Al Jourgensen: Jesus built his hotrod... and his pirate ship

...and several other incredibly important observations you felt you had to share with us this month.

SHAMMSTEIN

I enjoyed the Rammstein mega-issue last month but am I the only one who thinks they haven’t actually done a good album since *Mutter*? Been living off a good show for far too long now for me.
Cat Dunn, email

You’re probably not the *only* one. Like, someone else in the world must think something that ludicrous. Someone, somewhere. Anywhere? Anyone? Ah, shit. Sorry, Cat, it’s just you, mate.

TWENTY ONE SECONDS TO BLOW

Ladies and gentlemen of the *Metal Hammer* world, I’m putting it out there now and I’m not ashamed to say this: Twenty One Pilots are one of the best live bands you’ll find around at the moment.
Adam Turner, Reader Group

Well, the nicest thing we can say about this is that as we technically haven’t *seen* Twenty One Pilots yet, we can’t technically argue against this point. Although it’s kind of like how you assume it’d hurt to have your toes lopped off, but until you’ve tried it...

ANGRY WORDS

St. Anger has its place. It captures the chaos and stress Metallica were going through at the time. Don’t forget, for a time, nobody was sure if there’d even *be* a Metallica after James went radio silent in rehab.
Justin Amrhein, Facebook

***St Anger* absolutely has its place and that place is collecting dust on our CD rack because yes, we still went and bought it like schmucks when it came out. That said, *The Unnamed Feeling* is still a banger.**

FOREVER FIRESTARTERS

Yeah, OK, so The Prodigy weren’t metal. We know that, as do the media, as do the Prodigy themselves. That doesn’t mean their music didn’t appeal to metalheads. Metal is considered an alternative music genre. You don’t get much more alternative than the Prodigy.
Samuel Vorstar, Facebook

You also don’t get as many albums as straight-up fucking badass as *Music For The Jilted Generation* and *The Fat Of The Land*. Honestly, we’re still just gutted about Keith. So much so that we’ve run a feature on how awesome The Prodigy were this month.

WHY IS THE RUM GONE?

Is it just me or does Al Jourgensen look like Johnny Depp took a lot of acid on the set of *Pirates Of The Caribbean* and never came out of character?
Caju Griffen, Facebook

Put it this way: if that was actually what had happened then we might actually give a fuck about the next Hollywood Vampires album.

THE BIG DEADLINES

Calling the fact that the new System Of A Down album is not happening ‘news’ is like

#TWEETS

Grunge was and still is garbage!
@HORRORFIED

How much trouble do you think I’ll be in with my wife when she finds out I got a ticket to see @burytomorrow the Saturday before Christmas which goes completely against what we discussed doing for Christmas with our families?
@COLLETTKEVIN

The fact that so many grown men (and it is always men) feel the need to post on music fb posts (such as @MetalHammer articles) about how much they hate the band(s) mentioned is so depressing.
@THE_BITTER_END

Who goes into a Venom Prison album expecting it to be romantic? I guess maybe if you’re into cutting cocks off.
@OLIWILTON

Really, grow up, who cares if someone doesn’t like your music, I can’t imagine how much criticism Slipknot has got over there career dont hear them crying
@MUDSITH

As a diehard Crue fan, I am losing respect for Sixx
@DMCMEDIALA

PRESS

Manowar: never ask them for a pint

reporting that there hasn't been an earthquake in London this week.
Ronnie Anderson, Facebook

Also in the news this week: Napoleon is still dead, *EastEnders* is still shit and you still can't see John Cena.

FRIENDS FOREVER

Metalheads tend to be the nicest, friendliest, most personable people in my experience. I'm also pretty sure that I've read about studies that show that rock and metal fans tend to be better adjusted than other music fans. Sadly, some people seem to only know about metal from some outdated stereotypes from 80s teen movies.
Robert Christie, Facebook

Clearly, you haven't met the people on our Facebook page. Oh, wait, you *are* one of the people on our Facebook page. Everything we thought we knew has changed forever.

LIFE LESSONS

You will never please everyone in anything you do, it's fucking impossible. Newsflash: you don't have to like every fucking song produced by every band you ever like. Listen to what you enjoy and stop whining about shit you don't.
Jade Blunt, Facebook

…nope, we got nothing. Fair fucks. Jade's sewn up The Internet here.

BARO-YES!

Surely it's time for another Baroness album? Such a brilliant band. I think they should surprise everyone and do a BLACK album.
Christine Acres, email

Call us pedantic but we think someone's already done one of those, Christine.

MANO… WHAT?

I met Joey DeMaio once briefly in Germany in the 1980s. My mate, a bass player himself, told Joey that he was his favourite bassist and he wanted to be a better bass player than him. Joey's reply? "And one day you will drink my blood." We left him alone after that.
Wayne Tinnion, Facebook

We'd like to think this actually happened, even if it means we'd have absolutely no idea what the fuck Joey was on about (and not for the first time, bless his metal hide).

THE BIG DEBATE

Earlier this month, *Metal Hammer* scribe Stephen Hill opined that it's time to stop looking to mainstream-denting bands like Bring Me The Horizon and appreciate metal succeeding at its roots

HE SAID

"There is very little to suggest that metal thrives by being more commercial. Pantera and Slipknot scored No.1 albums with the brutal *Far Beyond Driven* and savage *Iowa*."

YOU SAY

"At least *Metal Hammer* now mostly accept what we all told you years ago. Now never mention BMTH again, please."
Justin Long, Facebook

"Things always change, but come around again. The 80s sound has never died, it's just been adapted. Support the bands who are *true* metal; there are other music magazines that deal in pop and throwaway music."
David Earle, Facebook

"The metal scene would go nuts if BMTH dropped a hard metal album again."
Harry Bates, Facebook

"If you change the basis of metal, it is then another genre. Metal is not 'screamo' or 'djent' or any of that horse shit. Metal is an attitude that can be *expressed* with music."
Mich SC, Facebook

"We need metal in the mainstream to survive. Simple."
Jen Anners, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

AMON AMARTH
Berserker
"Just wanna spend the week drinking mead and watching Thor movies tbh"
MERLIN ALDERSLADE
EDITOR

DEVIN TOWNSEND
Empath
"An insane number of ideas realised in one album, I'll be figuring this out for years"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR

POSSESSED
Revelations Of Oblivion
"The very heart of death metal, in all its scabrous glory"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

MARILYN MANSON
Mechanical Animals
"With Louise blasting *Celebrity Skin*, it only seemed right for me to play some Mazza in light of our Beautiful Monsters feature"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

HOLE
Celebrity Skin
"Instant nostalgia, reminds me of pogoing in clubs when I was young"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

ALICE IN CHAINS
Dirt
"The first AIC record I ever bought and it's been on heavy rotation in my car this month"
ALICE PATTILLO
ONLINE EDITOR

PRESS

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MYRATH

BLAZING. DESERT. METAL.

SHEHILI

THE NEW ALBUM
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NEW NOISE

MYRATH

Racking up millions of hits on YouTube and officially Led Zep-approved, Myrath are Tunisia's biggest metal success story

WORDS: MATT MILLS

"I'M SO LUCKY that I was raised in a family of artists," begins Zaher Zorgati, lead singer of metal underdogs Myrath. "My father was an actor and my grandfather was a director in a theatre. And, in my childhood, I was always listening to metal and music on the radio."

With the frontman emanating from such a musical and theatrical background, you'd be forgiven for assuming that he grew up with several advantages to eventually excel in the arts. However, Zaher's lifelong journey, from a youngster surrounded by an expressive family to a symphonic metal musician, takes place against an arduous backdrop: Tunisia.

When Myrath first formed in the early 2000s, their home country was a totalitarian dictatorship. It had been governed solely by one man, President Ben Ali, since 1987. While initially seen by many as a progressive leader, his regime became one accused of viciously bridling free speech, allegedly turning a blind eye to harsh living conditions, mass unemployment and widespread political corruption.

"When you have a Minister Of Culture, automatically, art is censored and controlled," Zaher explains. "You couldn't be critical of the government or you would go to jail, directly. But, if you weren't talking bullshit about the president, you sometimes had the ability to do metal gigs and festivals."

Said shows were far from glamorous. Although Tunisia had a tangible metal scene in the 2000s, most bands were restricted to performing hard rock covers in run-down venues. Myrath's long-time producer, Kevin Codfert, recalls one occasion where the band "played in the rain, with wires on the floor and no amps. It was a nightmare!"

It wasn't until 2006 when the troupe finally stood on the first rung of the ladder to success. That March, former Led Zeppelin singer Robert Plant was set to play the biggest rock concert in Tunisian history and needed a local opening act. As the most prolific original band in the country, Myrath stepped up to the plate.

"It was the first and last time we saw Robert Plant in Tunisia," says Kevin. "For a little band like Myrath, playing in front of 7,000 people was a big deal. It was awesome for them and it was something I'd never heard before. It was the first time I heard real oriental influences in symphonic metal."

Hot off their high-profile slot supporting one of the biggest rock stars on the planet, Myrath knuckled down and refined their sound. Over their first two albums, *Hope* and *Desert Call*, the five-piece established their own style of heavy music, mixing the power of Blind Guardian with the folk music of their homeland.

"Musically, we started doing things differently to other bands," Zaher recalls. "Tunisia had the Ottoman Empire, the Roman invasion, and international influences from the south of Spain and the rest of Africa.

...when you see it...

We grew up with all these civilisations and histories, as well as the native music. That's why we have a different, oriental metal style."

WITH THEIR METHODOLOGY refined, Myrath hit the studio with Kevin once again in late 2010 to make their third album, *Tales Of The Sands*. However, as they recorded, Tunisia was suddenly thrust into revolution. After being abused by corrupt police, a young market vendor called Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest, commencing a nationwide uprising that would rage for almost a month. The government battled to maintain control, with armies patrolling the streets and implementing strict 7pm curfews – which Myrath defied in order to make their album.

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Awe-inspiring power metal choruses cast against a backdrop of Middle-Eastern melodies

FOR FANS OF:
Sonata Arctica, Symphony X, Orphaned Land

LISTEN TO:
Dance

Zaher elaborates, "We had to take secret routes to sneak out in the night. The army said, 'If we see anybody outside, we will shoot – even if it's a cat or a dog.' Anything moving in the street at night would be shot. Anis [Jouini, bassist] had a knife on him in case we got caught. It was dangerous, but we had to reach the studio!"

In heavy metal – a subculture that prides itself on dedication and loyalty to its music – this is the pinnacle of what we're supposed to be all about. Myrath faced mortal danger on a nightly basis to bring their symphonic tunes to the world, at a time when the band weren't even being paid and still had to maintain full-time jobs. Zaher tells of how, during these weeks of upheaval, they had to board up their houses and shops, for fear of violent looters stealing their wares while they recorded.

Post-coup, Tunisia is now a secular democracy and, though still far from idyllic, the band describe it as a more artistically liberal place. Myrath themselves have had their unquestionable graft rewarded with a record deal from earMUSIC – the home of power metal royalty Dragonforce, Gamma Ray and Stratovarius. Their music video for the 2016 track *Believer* has amassed almost four million hits on YouTube, setting the stage for the band's brand-new album, *Shehili*.

"THE ARMY SAID IF THEY SAW ANYONE, THEY WOULD SHOOT"

Boasting catchy tracks like *Dance* and *No Holding Back, Shehili* is an uncompromised continuation of Myrath's orchestral, native-inspired power metal. Violins perform grand, Islamic melodies, while Zaher himself sings about the undying significance of hope and positivity.

"Some people see us as lucky, because we have albums and are signed to a major label in Europe," the vocalist summarises. "But they don't know how much we struggled and sacrificed for 15 years. It was rare to get any income. We just enjoyed recording and playing live; that's it. All we want is to record more and play more. That's our purpose."

***SHEHILI* IS OUT MAY 3 VIA EARMUSIC**

PRESS

NEW NOISE

BRUTUS

A clattering clash of punk and post-rock has borne one of 2019's most unique albums

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

THE EMERGENCE OF a raft of exceptional Belgian metal bands over the last decade has been one of our scene's most unexpected treats. From Oathbreaker to Rise And Fall and, most pertinently, Amenra and their many offshoots, Belgium is a true hot spot of unique and inventive heavy sounds at present.

"We're quite a weird group of people, Belgians," smiles Brutus drummer and vocalist Stefanie Mannaert. "We have been told that we have a very different outlook on life. Being a little odd, and maybe awkward, are clear Belgian personality traits. All the bands you mentioned sound very different. We're quite insular, I think that might play into our music a bit."

It does make sense when you listen to the music Brutus make; new album *Nest* is certainly an unusually eclectic meld of many styles that really shouldn't work on paper. Elegant post-rock beauty collides with boisterous and clattering punk rock, all held together with Stefanie's stunning vocal range that swerves from melodic and glacial to raw and impassioned throughout.

"We never sit down and try to decide what type of music we are going to make," Bassist Peter Mulders says as he tries to explain their sound. "I couldn't tell you what sort of band we are. Punk? Post-hardcore? Rock? I think there is all of that on the album. We've become really adept at just tapping into each other."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
The sound of hardcore punks growing up and falling in love with ethereal post-rock

FOR FANS OF:
Oathbreaker, Refused, Cult Of Luna

LISTEN TO:
War

It's doubly impressive when you learn that Stefanie became the band's vocalist completely by chance. "Originally, we were just an instrumental band and we talked about adding a singer," she laughs. "The guys suggested I just filled in for a while. A few months later I was like, 'So… about that new vocalist then?' and they just looked at each other. I knew then that I was stuck with it."

This happy accident led to the band signing to the hugely respected Sargent House Records, a situation that, as fans of the label, they can hardly believe. "It's an honour. There's this idea that labels don't mean anything anymore," Peter tells us. "But when you see that name on a record it's a sign of true quality." And with *Nest*, that quality isn't dropping one iota. H

***NEST* IS OUT NOW VIA SARGENT HOUSE**

WASTE OF SPACE ORCHESTRA

Oranssi Pazuzu and Dark Buddga Rising unite to redefine heaviness

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY

DEBUTING NEW SONGS live can be daunting for any band. In the case of Waste Of Space Orchestra, though, no one had heard a note of their music until they premiered it on stage. Comprised of members from the mind-bending Finnish psych doom and black metal bands Dark Buddha Rising and Oranssi Pazuzu, Waste Of Space Orchestra was created when Roadburn festival commissioned the two bands to create a set of music together especially for the festival last year. It pulled in one of the biggest crowds of the whole weekend.

"I'd been going to Roadburn for years before I ever dreamed I'd play there," says Oranssi Pazuzu frontman Juho 'Jun-His' Vanhanen. "I trusted that the audience would have the concentration to dig into something new. "I had nervousness, more because we'd been working for six months for that one day… if something goes wrong it'd be a major disappointment. But it went smoothly, and we realised that we couldn't leave it there."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
A progressive trip through eerie extreme metal

FOR FANS OF:
Pink Floyd, Ufomammut, Darkspace

LISTEN TO:
Seeker's Reflection

This meant heading into the studio to put this self-described "progressive space opera" to tape: the result is *Syntheosis*, swarming with twisting yet tightly composed sinister and monumentally heavy psychedelia, written around a suitably out-there concept following three characters, which Jun-His describes as "a journey to your mind's dark side".

"There is so much music nowadays where you don't have to concentrate so much, and I think it's good to have something to linger in your mind," says Jun-His. "When you listen to it again, you find new layers and interpretations. It's pretty visual: in Oranssi Pazuzu we have a criteria where you have to be able to have visual ideas in your head to continue working with a song. If not, we throw that part away." As for the future, nothing is set in stone beyond an album release show in Helsinki this June. But for this collective that are redefining heavy music, we hope their journey won't end there. H

***SYNTHEOSIS* IS OUT NOW VIA SVART RECORDINGS**

PRESS/WOSO: M LAHTIN.

ANY GIVEN DAY

Proving they're so much more than just that metal Rihanna cover...

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Catchy, diverse and richly polished modern metal

FOR FANS OF:
Killswitch Engage, We Came As Romans, Northlane

LISTEN TO:
Lonewolf

WHAT MAKES A video go viral? Marketing teams and influencers have been trying to work it out for years. No one expected five German metallers and a gnarled-up version of a Rihanna song to achieve it in 2013. "We're not just the '*Diamonds*' band!" insists Any Given Day frontman Dennis Deihl, but nonetheless it was their cover of RiRi's banger that gave them a platform from which to thrive... and they ran with it.

Now, big numbers are commonplace for the guys, with recent single *Saviour* racking up 2 million views, a feat that only seems to push the band further.

"We never wanted to be the band that just makes hardcore or metalcore," Dennis confirms. "With each album we want to develop ourselves and create a new sound that people don't know. We wanted to do everything we love – a journey through the music we've been listening to over the years."

That journey has led to third album *Overpower*, which flaunts its influences. There's the seething nu metal rap that opens up *Loveless*, the djent breakdown that erupts in *Taking Over Me*, with touches of Killswitch Engage running across both the band's core sound and the thundering growls and explosive cleans of Dennis's vocals.

Ultimately, it's probably luck that grants you a viral video, but to cultivate a following like Any Given Day's requires much more. For Dennis the key is originality: "You hear so much music from so many bands, but sometimes they're so similar. With Any Given Day, we have created our own sound."

***OVERPOWER* IS OUT NOW VIA ARISING EMPIRE**

MASTIFF

Thick, disgusting and indigestible hardcore. What's not to love?

WORDS: HYWEL DAVIES

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Thick-riffed hardcore that's like flossing your ears with barbed wire

FOR FANS OF:
Attan, Nails, Biohazard

LISTEN TO:
Brainbleed

INFECTING THE METAL underground with a new strain of bubonic hatred, Hull's Mastiff have been sweating sludge and bleeding agony since 2013. Taking doom-infused hardcore and injecting it with rabies, every last drop of nihilistic revulsion they have for society manifests itself as the band's blistering sophomore album, *Plague*.

"For the type of music we make, it doesn't benefit from being clinical and precise. You want it to be as visceral and primitive as it can be," explains guitarist James Lee about the origins of Mastiff's sound."[Being from] Hull, I mean... for every nice thing about it there's a hundred miserable things that shit on it. That sense of isolation of being stuck in this crumbling post-industrial city certainly helps feed the miserable sound that we go for."

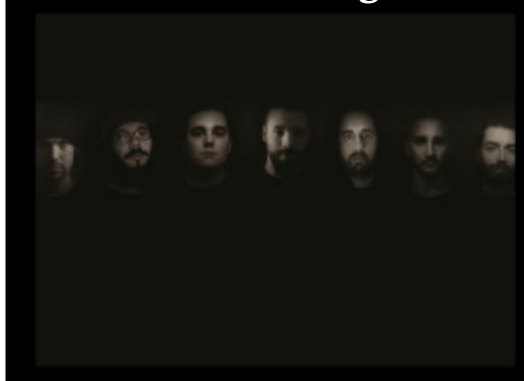
Their disdain towards social media is at the beating heart of *Plague*, hammering home its polluting impact on our civilisation's mentality. "It's a horrible place to be," says vocalist Jim Hodge. "It's fucked the younger generation and it's dragging more and more people down with it. The damage's been done. It's just dragging so much negative shit into the world."

Yeah, we're fucked. But at least we have the right soundtrack for it.

***PLAGUE* IS OUT NOW VIA APF**

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to



EQUIPOISE

"**THEY JUST DROPPED** their debut album, *Demiurgus*, on one of the best new record labels for death metal, The Artisan Era. The band features Chason Westmoreland who played drums with Hate Eternal and The Faceless, and the album is a whirlwind. Shredding guitars and fretless bass. Complex and brutal drumming. Your jaw will be on the floor."

SAHIL 'DEMON-STEALER' MAKHIJA (DEMONIC RESURRECTION)

PRESS

HOARD ALMIGHTY

A Viking special, featuring only the worthiest gifts of the gods. Prepare to pillage, people!

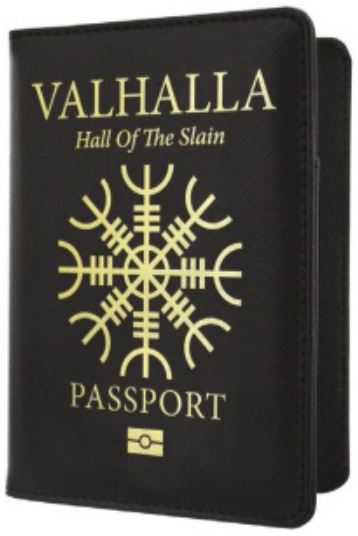
VENOM
IN NOMINE SATANAS - 40TH ANNIVERSARY DELUXE BOXSET

BMG

£150

THE 'WILD HUNT' of Norse myth has been likened to the clattering tumult of black metal, and that tumult doesn't get older, noisier or wilder than the early work of sainted Geordie hellraisers Venom. The foundational work of the Cronos/Mantas/Abaddon trio is virtually unrivalled in its impact and influence, with every subsequent generation of thrash, black and death metalhead owing something to Venom's boundary-breaking innovations. Along with a 12"x12" book by our own Dom Lawson detailing Venom's history, a two-sided tour poster, a backpatch and (for the first 300) a Cronos-signed art card, this sumptuous box collects together their first four LPs, their 1986 live album, plus an exciting platter of unreleased demos, including their first embryonic rackets from 1979 with 'Jesus Christ' on vocals (he clearly had to go). Production and musicianship have improved over the years, but these earthy historic thrills still take the breath away.

http://tinyurl.com/venom-deluxe



VALHALLA PASSPORT COVER

£22

There are two routes to The Hall Of The Slain. Either die fearlessly in battle or present this to a stony-faced guardian at border control and convince them of your worth. Only one of these methods is guaranteed, however.

http://tinyurl.com/valhalla-passport

VIKING SHIP INCENSE BURNER

£22.79

Prep for your own glorious Viking funeral with this warship-shaped incense holder – guaranteed to make your flat smell nicer than the stench of charred human flesh.

http://tinyurl.com/incense-ship

TREE OF LIFE RING

£30.44

We can't guarantee that this stainless steel ring will grant access to the nine realms but its depiction of the Norse Tree Of Life, Yggdrasil, will undoubtedly cast a mystic aura on all who bear it.

http://tinyurl.com/yggdrasil-ring

THOR'S HAMMER CARPET

£24.99

Whether you're a Gene Simmons or a Johan Hegg, there's room in your home for a little Thor on the floor. Strike the hammer down, strike a yoga pose – the possibilities are simply endless.

http://tinyurl.com/thors-rug

TURISAS T-SHIRT

£22

An unusually understated design from the colourful Finnish 'battle metal' pioneers, festooned with hairy black-and-charcoal Viking skulls and swords. Maybe if Turisas shift enough of these they'll even contemplate releasing a new album?

http://tinyurl.com/turisas-tee

VIKING PRAYER COFFEE MUG

£16.20

Aside from being filled with Valhalla Java coffee, this receptacle of wisdom can be used for drinking tea, cocoa or the blood of your enemies. The 'prayer' purportedly dates back to circa 100AD, but was popularised by the 1999 Antonio Banderas film *The 13th Warrior*.

http://tinyurl.com/prayer-mug

THURISAZ PENDANT

£70

This handsome pendant bears the 'thurisaz' rune, which means either 'giant' or 'thorn', depending on how you read it. Just don't combine the two, though, or you'll end up with 'giant prick'.

http://tinyurl.com/thurisaz-pendant

THOR HOODIE

£44.99

Let's face it: most of us don't have the budget, willpower or free time to chisel ourselves into Chris Hemsworth proportions. Thankfully this natty hoodie will mask our imperfections while giving off the full Thor effect.

http://tinyurl.com/thor-hoodie

VIKING SHOT GLASS SET

£37.29

It's horny. Horny, horny, horny. What is? This shot glass set, hewn from the skulls of real-life oxen. The perfect vessel from which to sup either sweet, sweet mead or the still-warm blood of thine enemies.

http://tinyurl.com/horny-shots

RUNIC CIRCLE WATCH

£50.99-£52.49

Need to see if there's time for another cheeky flagon? You'll be the toast of the tavern when you roll up your gauntlet and check the time on this wooden watch inscribed with ancient runes and optional saying on the back.

http://tinyurl.com/runic-watch

JÖRMUNGANDR BRACELET

£30.60

Emblazon yourself with this rune-scarred image of Jörmungandr: world serpent, banished child of Loki, and the one thing keeping Ragnarok at bay. Or: a ruddy big snake, eating its own arse.

http://tinyurl.com/serpent-bracelet

BATHORY T-SHIRT

£17.99

Raise your sword to the origins of Viking metal, but probably best to wait until you've donned this t-shirt bearing the cover to Bathory's *Blood Fire Death*, and the glorious painting, The Wild Hunt Of Odin.

http://tinyurl.com/blood-fire-tee

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AMON AMARTH

THE MAN WHO COULD BE KING

Could a Swedish band singing about Vikings really become heavy metal legends? As Amon Amarth unleash *Berserker*, Johan Hegg prepares to establish a legacy for the ages

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: STEVE BROWN • DIGITAL MANIPULATION: STEVE NEWMAN

Amon Amarth (left to right): Jocke Wallgren, Olavi Mikkonen, Johan Hegg, Ted Lundström, Johan Söderberg

THUNK!

There's something satisfying about launching an axe from your hand, then watching it pivot through the air with a surprising grace and embed itself deep in a wooden target 15 feet away.

THUNK!

It's a feeling that dates back millennia, ever since humans worked out how to turn tools into weapons: primeval, aggressive, but weirdly noble.

CLANG!

That's the sound an axe makes when it doesn't do what it's supposed to do, bouncing off the wooden boards and clattering to the floor. Today, that particular sound is followed by a loudly grumbled, Scandinavian-accented, "Shit. This is not a good day. I'm normally better than this."

The source of the expletive is Johan Hegg, Amon Amarth frontman, Viking metal poster boy and, if advanced hype is anything to go by, axe-hurler of some repute.

Johan and *Hammer* have convened, hatchet-handed, under some railway arches a few hundred metres south of the Thames in central London. Our hosts are Whistle Punks, an "urban axe-throwing club" that allows the public – and six-foot-five metal singers with weaponised facial hair – to take out the day's frustrations by lobbing gleaming choppers at increasingly battered targets.

For the next 60 minutes, a grand battle royale will take place between Sweden's finest horn-raising, mead-swilling Asgardian and *Hammer*'s weaselly, laptop-bothering, decidedly non-heroic writer. It won't be elegant, it won't be pretty, and it may involve loss of limbs.

Gentlemen, let's start our axes…

Amon Amarth's ascent to metal's loftier echelons defies most rational explanations. They're a band who emerged from the febrile early-90s Swedish death metal scene to spend the next 25 years singing about rampaging Norsemen, one-eyed gods and the halls of Valhalla.

Weirdly, it's worked for them. Each of the 10 albums they have released has been more and more successful than its predecessor, to the point where the last one, 2016's *Jomsviking*, hit No.1 in Germany and even cracked the UK Top 30. Their shows have been getting bigger and more expensive by the year: in 2017, they headlined Bloodstock and Germany's Summer Breeze festivals within a week of each other, tooling up enough pyro in each case to lay waste to a medium-sized town and instigating a spontaneous and unofficial Epic Viking Rowing contest between the two crowds.

Amon Amarth's 11th album, *Berserker*, won't upset that upwards trajectory. It's bigger and more anthemic than anything they've made before, while retaining their essential Amon Amarth-ness. The hobnail riffs and horns-aloft choruses are custom-designed to work vast crowds up into a mass frenzy without compromising their thunderous attack: you can draw an unbroken line directly from it to their beginnings as outsiders on the Stockholm scene, not least in Johan's ever-present growl.

"WHAT YOU SEE ONSTAGE IS AN EXAGGERATION OF WHO I AM, NOT A CHARACTER"

Behind the scenes, too, things suggest a surge in ambition. This is the first album they're releasing on Music For Nations, the reactivated British metal label backed with the not-unimpressive muscle of Sony Music. They've got the same heavyweight management team that look after Slipknot in their corner. It all suggests a band ready to meet the world head-on like never before.

Johan Hegg has a neat phrase to encapsulate this new phase of his band's career: Amon Amarth 2.0. Which means, in his words, "Still Amon Amarth, but another level of Amon Amarth."

The first thing you notice about Johan when you meet him is his sheer physical presence. He's a big man: not fat or bulky, just large and imposing and fearsome looking, with a beard that suggests somewhere a Viking village is missing a chieftain.

But then you quickly realise that, actually, he is nothing like that at all. He may be a dab hand at lobbing an axe – at least in theory – but he's also quietly spoken, thoughtful and funny. When he's not hamming it up onstage with Amon Amarth, he practises both MMA (mixed martial arts) and yoga (his wife teaches the latter). You're unlikely to find him chowing down on a freshly spit-roasted haunch of meat; he says he's "mostly" vegetarian, at least off the road. And while his wedding ceremony was a full-on medieval re-enactment, the song he proposed to his wife to was Journey's epic soft rock ballad, *Lights*.

"What you see onstage is an exaggeration of who I am," he says in word-perfect English, in an uncomfortably small booth in a riverside pub just around the corner from Whistle Punks and its axe-throwing mayhem. "It's not a character, like Alice Cooper, but it's a bit of a persona. It's an emphasised Johan Hegg up there. More theatrical, more outgoing. A little bigger."

What isn't emphasised or exaggerated is his love of Viking culture. What might seem like shtick to anyone only superficially acquainted with Amon Amarth is actually a deeply abiding, and oddly rational, fascination with the culture of ancient Scandinavia. He's heavily involved with Grimfrost, a company that makes 'authentic' Viking products, from beard braids and dinner plates to helmets and robes.

BAND PHOTO: PRESS

Remind us again why we pissed him off...

The Viking theme that runs through Amon Amarth's music stretches back to their inception in 1992. It started out as a combination of Johan's fascination with that era and a way of setting them apart from what the singer describes as "a lot of bands singing about Satan". Today, it's become their defining characteristic. Maybe to the point of caricature. Doesn't that bother him?

"In some ways, yes. But I also think what I've tried to do is use the history and the mythology as a backdrop for the modern stuff I want to talk about. On this album, for instance, there's a song called *Into The Dark*. It's really about the fact that we all carry a darkness inside of us. We all do things that maybe aren't rational, that are counter-productive to what we want to achieve."

And do you have that darkness inside you?

"Of course."

How does it manifest itself?

"As a child, I had a lot of anger issues. As an adult, I've carried a lot of that anger. There are things in my personality I'm not proud of. A bunch of stuff that I personally have been going through over the years."

Such as what?

"I don't really need to go into specifics."

But you've written a song about it.

"That's the thing. I can write a song about it without laying it all out there. But that song is about realising the way you behave sometimes that either hurts yourself or other people. It doesn't necessarily all have to be about me. It's about the darkness we find in ourselves sometimes, that we often forget that we carry around."

"I'VE CARRIED A LOT OF THE ANGER I HAD AS A CHILD"

You rapidly find that this is the most frustrating thing about Johan Hegg. The Norse marauder front is hugely entertaining, but it's hard to work out what's really going on behind the beard – and something clearly is going on. He's just not saying what it is.

"There's a reason why we crave stories and books, movies, theatre, whatever," he says. "And the reason is that through stories we can discuss really difficult topics without actually pushing all the buttons."

So would Amon Amarth ever release a Viking-free album?

"Maybe," he says, smiling. "We have kind of painted ourselves into a corner."

He's joking. Or at least half-joking. Or perhaps he isn't joking at all and simply doesn't give a damn.

Meanwhile, back at the axe range, things are hotting up, at least for one of us. The first of our three head-to-head battles isn't going so well for *Hammer*. The Viking blood coursing through Johan's veins is working its ancient magic. Each axe he throws sails through the air towards the target, its trajectory as true as… well, an axe being thrown by a large beardy bloke from Sweden.

In *Hammer*'s defence, Johan does have an advantage. He's done this before, and not just with the piffling little hand axes we're chucking today. No, he's lobbed a full-on twin-bladed axe before, a properly hefty mini-weapon of mass destruction with two dangerously sharpened pieces of metal sticking out of either side of its business end. "You have to be very careful when you're lifting that one over your back," he says.

And that's not all. He even considered building a proper axe-throwing range just like this one in his backyard. "But I have a cat," he says, shaking his head. "It could have been messy."

Hammer's protestations that such advantages give Johan a headstart and he should be penalised by having at least one hand chopped off, or at least a few points docked to start with, fall on deaf ears.

The result of this first bout is predictable: Johan takes it. There's a song on *Berserker* called *The Berserker At Stamford Bridge*, about an 11th-century battle that took place in what would become Yorkshire between the English king Harold Godwinson and an encroaching Viking army. Remarkably, the English defenders defeated these rampaging hordes and, according to historians (or Wikipedia, anyway), put an end to the Viking age.

Right now, it feels like Vikings are having their revenge.

It hasn't always been smooth sailing for Amon Amarth. They started out as a bunch of death metal kids in the far-flung Stockholm suburb of Tumba. They knew the prime movers from the local scene but they were never ushered into the inner circle.

"I'm not going to say that we felt like outsiders, but we didn't really feel like we were part of it either," says Johan, in the riverside pub. "We were a bit too late to be part of the movement that started with Entombed and Dismember and those bands. And by that time, the Gothenburg scene was becoming dominant, and we were too far away from there to be part of that one."

What it did do was force Amon Amarth to find their own thing: that 'thing' being the Viking theme that would come to define their career. There were concerns: that kind of celebration of cultural heritage carried a nasty whiff of extreme nationalism and white supremacy, thanks in part to the antics of some of the more swivel-eyed members in neighbouring Norway's black metal scene. "No, no, no, we wanted nothing to do with that," says Johan. "That wasn't why were doing this. I was fascinated with the historical and cultural parts of Viking society and how it reflected modern society."

Enjoy it while it lasts, big man…

Just like his ancestors

Amon Amarth's early ambitions were small and achievable rather than grand and overblown: play a gig, record a demo, get signed to a label, get signed to a bigger label.

"There was no plan," says Johan. "From the start I was doing this because it was fucking fun. It was great just writing these awesome songs, hanging out with friends, getting shit-faced."

Johan held down a succession of day jobs during the band's early days. He worked as a butcher at one point. At another point he was a salesmen, selling cheese for a supermarket. "I was the best cheese salesman there," he says proudly.

What was your secret?

"I was just good at convincing people to buy cheese," he says, like it's the stupidest question he's ever been asked.

Two things happened around the same time that knocked the wind of out his sails. Firstly he lost his job as a cheese salesman (don't laugh). Then the wheels started to come off Amon Amarth.

The band's first three albums had all done well, but none had broken through. Johan and his bandmates were becoming disillusioned with it all. They were stuck in a rut. If people weren't listening, what was the point in continuing?

"It was very serious," he says. "We'd even planned it out. All the songs on our new album were about the end of the world. So was the cover, everything. It was, 'This is it, we're done, thank you, goodbye.'"

Amon Amarth were truly ready to hang up their shields and swords when they got an invite to play Germany's legendary Wacken festival. 'Why not?' they figured.

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AMON AMARTH

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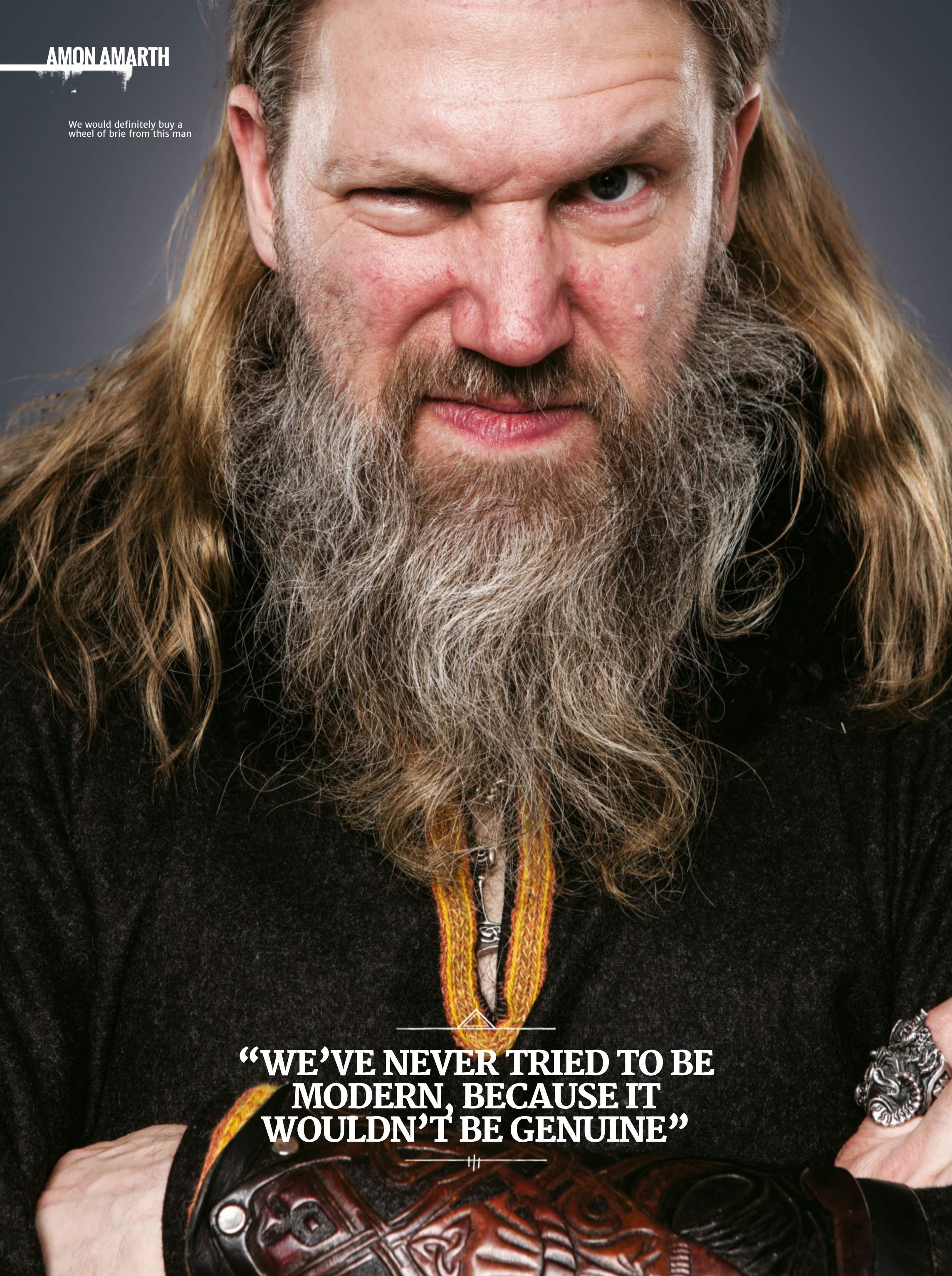

“WE’VE NEVER TRIED TO BE MODERN, BECAUSE IT WOULDN’T BE GENUINE”

Yeah, very good... but how many are on the floor, eh?

'It's a cool way to go out.' They were on in the middle of the afternoon, low down the bill, so they had nothing to lose. They played a brand new song, *Death In Fire*. The entire crowd went bananas.

"We were, like, 'Wait a minute, there's something here,'" recalls Johan. "And we thought, 'Maybe we should have another whack at it.' I felt so relieved."

They swapped the cover, changing the image from one of defeat to defiance, and released the album, *Versus The World*, in 2002 – a title that could have been the band's motto ever since.

Subsequent albums and attendant live shows have repositioned Amon Amarth as one of modern metal's biggest draws. Except there's nothing really modern about them. They're part of a trad-metal lineage that stretches back to the dawn of the genre, far away from the next-gen stylings of Parkway Drive or Code Orange or Deafheaven or any of the other bands taking metal forwards.

"We're not modern," says Johan evenly. "We've never we tried to do that, it wouldn't be genuine. We've always strived to do what we like. Those bands are who they are, just as we are who are we are. If we tried to be a modern metal band, it wouldn't be genuine. So why would we?"

It's hard to argue with that point.

"I WAS GOOD AT CONVINCING PEOPLE TO BUY CHEESE"

Back at the axe-throwing range, and it's seconds out, round two.

Johan's previous experience is undoubtedly coming in handy. He gets off to a ripping start, hitting the target four times out of five. But he's not managed a bullseye this time, instead making the outer rings for fewer points.

Worryingly for him, *Hammer* is starting to find its groove. All five of the axes we launch from increasingly steady hands – admittedly still in hope more than expectation – end up not just hitting the target but bifurcating it perfectly, handles jutting out at proud angles.

Our Swedish friend is starting to look disgruntled and not a little concerned. We're not saying it would be embarrassing for such an experienced chopper-botherer to lose to someone who's never thrown so much as a butter knife before, but... well, it would be embarrassing. *Really* embarrassing.

Hammer doesn't quite steal the victory: a peculiar and wholly unfair points system means it's a draw. But things are starting to swing back our way. The scent of blood is in our nostrils. The game, as they say in 'the sports', is on.

When you pause to think about it, Amon Amarth's success is remarkable. They may have toned down their more brutal edges over the years, but they're still a fearsomely full-blooded and uncompromising proposition. And they certainly haven't dialled down what, in terrible management consultant-speak, would be called their 'core brand values': i.e., singing songs about Vikings at maximum volume.

Of course, the flipside to all that is that you know *exactly* what you're getting from Amon Amarth. The themes might be tweaked from album to album and the dates of the battles they're singing about might be different, but this most larger-than-life band are sometimes guilty of playing it safe. Does Johan agree? He thinks about it for a few seconds.

"Yes. I think so."

Really? You don't seem that bothered.

"I mean, in a way we are. If we wanted to, we could step out of the comfort zone. We could definitely write about something else. But I'd say that it's partly giving our fans what they expect, and it's partly writing about something I feel I know about and care about."

True. You know what you're getting with Amon Amarth: songs about Vikings and a killer live show. But that's the point. Is there any more to you than that?

"I think musically we're brilliant and we put on great shows. But there is depth to the lyrics if you look for it. And if you're not looking for it, fine, these are great stories. Like Iron Maiden. They're diverse in their lyrics."

Are Amon Amarth as good as Maiden?

"I don't think so."

So how good are you?

"We're brilliant. But Iron Maiden are genius. I'll say this, though, I think we're on our way to being a band that can pick up the mantle one day, when Iron Maiden retire. Which I know they won't. But if they do, we're ready."

Back at the axe range, things aren't looking so rosy. The lifetime of practice Johan Hegg has put in so far in preparation for this very moment appears to have been wasted. Spoiler alert: the Viking is about to have his hairy arse handed to him on a pillaged silver plate, with a side order of hog's offal and a jug of mead to go.

We're reaching the last of our three bouts. Johan throws his chopper. It arcs through ▶

the air and caresses the target like a long-lost lover. Then it bounces straight back off and falls apologetically to the ground.

Throw two isn't much better. In fact it's even worse. The flat of the axe head hits the target, rather than the business end, and the same thing happens. This is getting embarrassing for the plucky Norseman.

Throw numbers three through five are hit and miss – specifically, more miss than hit. He makes the bullseye once, but that's all. "Damn," he snarls, and suddenly the centuries fall away and you can see the narked Viking warrior in him.

By contrast, *Metal Hammer*'s axes are finding their target every time. OK, there's the odd fluff, but mostly they're slicing satisfyingly into the distressed wooden boards. Thunk. Thunk. Thunk. Clatter. Thunk. It's pure beginner's luck, of course. But frankly, when you're facing down an increasingly annoyed Norseman with a potentially lethal weapon in his hand, you take any luck you can get.

And then it's done. *Metal Hammer* has 23 points to Johan's 21. It's like The Battle Of Stamford Bridge all over again.

Johan doesn't look happy. In *Berserker*, Amon Amarth may have made an album that will see them stepping up to the next level, but right now that's just a sticking plaster to cover up injured pride. "Next time, I get to pick the sport," he growls.

And what would that be?

"MMA."

There's nothing worse than a bad loser. Especially a Viking one.

"WHEN IRON MAIDEN RETIRE, WE'RE READY TO PICK UP THE MANTLE"

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HOW VIKING IS JOHAN HEGG?

We find out whether he's got the elite survival skills of a proper Norseman, or if he's just a wannabe with a nice beard

CAN YOU THROW AN AXE?
Johan Hegg: "I can throw an axe. Although today was not a good day. Honestly, it was terrible."

CAN YOU FORGE A SWORD?
Johan: "I know how you do it. I've seen it being done, I know all the steps you need to take. But I'm not sure I could do it. It's a lot of work."

CAN YOU MAKE A FIRE?
Johan: "What, with tinder and sticks? I haven't done it for years, but yes I can. Is that a necessary thing in my life? No. I have matches."

CAN YOU ROW A BOAT?
Johan: "Yes."

OK, BUT CAN YOU ROW AN ACTUAL VIKING BOAT?
Johan: "Yes. There's a place in Sweden near the Norwegian border where this river runs into this lake, and a bit further up there there's this Viking village. And they built this amazing longship that has 13 pairs of oars, so if it's fully manned, it's 26 people rowing. It's actually easier rowing a Viking ship, because you don't move around like you do in a normal boat. So yes, I can row a Viking boat."

CONCLUSION:
He might need some more practice with the axes, but we'd definitely want him on our longship if shit was going down. Praise be to Johan.

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THE LOST RECORDS

In a special feature, we look at the albums from some of metal's biggest names that were left unfinished, abandoned or lost in the sands of time...

WORDS: ALEX CHILLINGWORTH, STEPHEN HILL, DOM LAWSON, DANNII LEIVERS, ADAM REES

TAPEWORM

Featuring Trent Reznor, Phil Anselmo and Maynard James Keenan, this all-star NIN side-project remains under wraps

IT WAS ONE of the most eagerly anticipated records of the alt-metal era, a supergroup featuring some of the biggest names in 90s rock that had fans chomping at the bit. A Pantera and NIN mash-up? A duet between Trent Reznor and Maynard James Keenan? What's not to get excited about? So why did Tapeworm never see the light of day?

"Hey, I was just as excited about it as all of you," laughs former Nine Inch Nails keyboardist Charlie Clouser. "I mean, you see it on paper and it does look really cool. I can see why people were like, 'Just release it, man!' but it's really not as simple as that."

Tapeworm was formulated after Nine Inch Nails finished the end of the gargantuan touring schedule of 1994's *The Downward Spiral* album. With Trent Reznor keen to continue writing, he asked his band to reconvene in New Orleans to start the process of constructing a new NIN album.

"We were told that we would play a part in that process and that our ideas were welcome," Charlie says. "But in reality, we knew that 90% of the record would be from Trent. So, he told Danny [Lohner, NIN bassist] and I that any ideas we had that wouldn't work for Nails could be expanded on by us for our own project, and he'd put the results out on Nothing Records. It felt like a win-win."

As Charlie and Danny worked in isolation on songs, they began to dream up their own wishlist of musicians to duet alongside Trent.

"Maybe we were aiming way too high," Charlie shrugs. "But we approached Phil Anselmo, as we were all fans of Pantera. Maynard Keenan was an obvious one, I love Jaz

Nine Inch Nails (left to right): Robin Finck, Charlie Clouser, Trent Reznor, Jerome Dillon, Danny Lohner in Milan, November 1999

FABIO DIENA/ICONICPIX

Coleman, one of the most apocalyptic voices in music, Alec Empire had toured with Nine Inch Nails and we love Atari Teenage Riot, and we had a song that we thought would be perfect for Dave Gahan from Depeche Mode. The idea of these great vocalists trading verses with Trent excited us hugely."

Unfortunately, the lure of a new Nine Inch Nails album began to pull the pair away from concentrating on Tapeworm too heavily.

"When the behemoth that is a new Nine Inch Nails album is on the horizon, you want to be part of it," says Charlie. "Do I want to have a writing credit on that, or do I want to use my idea for this little, unevolved thing? It's a no-brainer, really. For example, I had a drum loop for a song that I was working on for Tapeworm and Trent really liked it. He took it away and it became the genesis for the song *Starfuckers, Inc.*, which is a far bigger deal, really."

"IT'S BECOME THIS MYTHICAL THING NOW. I LIKE THAT"

CHARLIE CLOUSER

Tapeworm was put to one side as NIN put all efforts into 1999's epic double album, *The Fragile*. After its release and subsequent world tour, Trent was exhausted, leaving Charlie and Danny hanging in the studio while he went to recharge his batteries. Alone, and with hours of tapes and ideas for Tapeworm left unfinished, the project simply fizzled out. A couple of reworked tracks appeared via Maynard James Keenan – A Perfect Circle's *Passive* and Puscifer's *Potions (Deliverance Mix)* – but nothing else has surfaced.

"It's like a leaf on a branch, isn't it?" Charlie explains. "If you don't water it then it dies. Lots of other leaves were getting watered at that time, and the Tapeworm leaf wasn't. So, it just died. I left the band and went off to work with Page Hamilton from Helmet [on 2004 comeback album *Size Matters*]. We do have a whole load of recordings from that time, but they're not ready, they're in no fit state to release."

And so, one of the most exciting supergroups in metal history remains just a rumour. "I kind of like it that way," smiles Charlie. "It's almost cooler that we never did release it. It's become this mythical thing now. There will always be an air of intrigue and mystery around it. Not many albums you've heard have that."

SLAYER

The thrash legends are on their farewell tour, but could there be an extra album from the Repentless sessions?

THEIR REIGN OF terror as a live band may be coming to an end, but Slayer still have unfinished business with their studio work. As Kerry King explained to us in 2016, the sessions for the band's last album, *Repentless*, were so fruitful that another studio record remains a real possibility.

"I think I never really got out of writing mode for the last record," the guitarist told *Hammer*. "There's so much extra material recorded – seven, eight or nine songs with guitar, drums and bass. They're just sitting there and as long as lyrics don't change them musically, they're done."

Whether this arsenal of unheard material is unleashed in standard album form or as bonus material on some future retrospective, we do at least know what it will sound like: fucking Slaaayyyeeeeerrrr! And wouldn't it be cool for the legends to bow out, leaving us with brand new evil anthems ringing in our ears? Yes. Yes it would. It's concerning that there's been no mention of these tantalising leftovers since Slayer announced their retirement, though. Let's have 'em!

GOJIRA

The eco metallers are still working on their all-star EP for conservation organisation Sea Shepherd

WHEN THEY KEEP releasing records as gloriously monstrous as 2016's *Magma*, it's easy to forget that Gojira have been promising us their much-discussed *Sea Shepherd* EP for absolutely bloody ages. Conceived in support of the titular anti-whaling organisation, the record is due to feature guest appearances from the likes of Devin Townsend, Randy Blythe, Max Cavalera and Anders Fridén. Only one song has emerged so far – *Of Blood And Salt*, released in 2011, featuring Devin and Meshuggah guitarist Fredrik Thordendal. It ruled, obviously.

But it's *definitely* on its way, as frontman Joe Duplantier told *Hammer* earlier this year. "We've been so busy that it's been hard to get it finished," he said. "We have some of the music and some of the vocal takes… it's kind of a nightmare to piece it all together. But it really needs to come out. I want to put it out there before the next record."

METALLICA

St. Anger came out to mixed reactions, but the Four Horsemen wrote a bunch of other songs in that era

CONSIDERING HOW LONG it generally takes them to make a new album, Metallica should probably release the much-rumoured Presidio Sessions. Recorded at a rented army barracks, at the same time as sessions for the controversial *St. Anger*, the material is known to be more melodic and straightforward than the clattering riff-jigsaw of that troubled album.

"Presidio was a place that we were recording in, in San Francisco, before the Headquarters was built and before I went into rehab," Papa Het told The Blitz 99.7 FM in 2004. "There was probably, I don't know, 15 songs or something, that didn't quite make it onto *St. Anger*. Maybe more. And those things, we've got 'em. They're cool. They're not finished, but they'll appear sometime somewhere. There'll be a right time for those."

Hopefully these hidden treasures will be unearthed soon. Either that or a new album. Or both. Crack on, chaps.

Layne Staley on *MTV Unplugged* in 1996. Did he leave us a gift?

LAYNE STALEY

The late Alice In Chains singer is said to have left some unfinished recordings behind

WHEN ORIGINAL ALICE In Chains frontman Layne Staley died on April 5, 2002 after many years of drug addiction, rock lost one of its most distinctive voices. In 2016, Jesse Holt, a Seattle musician and audio engineer, suddenly announced to Twitter that he was working on unfinished tracks that he had recorded with Layne.

One of the tracks is thought to be *Things You Do*, which later appeared on the soundtrack to the 2012 film *Grassroots*, and was credited to 'The Bondage Boys featuring Layne Staley'. Layne reportedly recorded his vocals for the song in 1997, although by that point the singer was deep in the grip of addiction, and as a result, his vocals are almost unrecognisable.

Tweeting Pearl Jam guitarist Mike McCready, who played alongside Layne in grunge-blues side-project Mad Season, Jesse asked if he would help put the finishing touches to the tracks, typing: 'Hey Mike McCready, help me produce eight unreleased tracks with Layne Staley singing on them. You'd love several of them.'

Mike never responded publicly, so who knows what's happening with the tracks now, but we're crossing our fingers that one day they'll be released and we'll get to hear what very well might have been the last things Layne ever recorded.

GETTY

Lemmy wouldn't let a silly little thing like death get in the way of new music

MICK HUTSON

LEMMY

The Motörhead frontman recorded a string of solo tracks with the likes of Dave Grohl and Joan Jett

TEN SOLO TRACKS WERE SHELVED WHEN LEMMY DIED

HUMANITY MAY BE circling the plughole, but hope is at hand: before Lemmy passed away in 2015, he recorded a solo album and it looks relatively feasible that it will be released at some point.

Recorded in Berlin, London and LA over 12 years, it reportedly features collaborations with Joan Jett, The Damned, German 90s rock icons Skew Siskin and US punkabilly hero Reverend Horton Heat. It was pieced together with producer Jim Voxx during breaks in Motörhead's festival schedule.

"The songs are composed by Lemmy," Jim told Metal Talk in 2017. "I was able to provide him the studio time he needed. As you know, during the summer, Motörhead were always doing festivals here in Europe and he used Berlin as a springboard so he had the time in the summer to be here and work on further tracks.

"He also recorded some tracks in America with Dave Grohl or Reverend Horton Heat and in London he was working with The Damned. All these tracks came to me in Berlin."

With tragic timing, Lemmy's solo album was effectively completed not long before he became seriously ill at the end of 2016. Understandably, the 10 tracks were shelved following the great man's death and no official announcement about their release has been made to date. Jim stated he didn't know when the record would be released, because it was in the hands of Motörhead's management. Motörhead seemed to confirm that the record's emergence was imminent, sharing the story on their official Facebook page and posting, "Exciting things in the works."

One song believed to be part of Lemmy's final studio sessions was released in 2017: the thundering *We Are The Ones*. Meanwhile, late Motörhead guitarist Würzel's final band, Leader Of Down, released their debut album in 2017, featuring *Paradise Turned Into Dust*, a Lemmy-led rocker recorded in 2015. But so far, no solo album.

You don't need to have paid close attention to Lemmy's 50+ year career to know that his solo work is unlikely to have deviated far from the straight-ahead rock 'n'roll that made him such an icon. This elusive solo record is almost certainly going to be full of cranked-up and belligerent rock'n'roll anthems, any semblance of diversity coming instead from a dazzling roll call of star contributors. Lemmy's brilliant team-up with Dave Grohl on the latter's Probot side-project in 2004, *Shake Your Blood*, would suggest that anything those two rock lifers did together is likely to be magnificent, and it's *those* tracks that we are most excited about hearing. Most of all, it's just comforting knowing there's MORE LEMMY TO COME.

Judas Priest in 1988. We have a morbid curiosity about the S/A/W tracks

JUDAS PRIEST

Birmingham's defenders of the faith collaborated with legendary hit-makers Stock, Aitken And Waterman

IN THE MID 80s, pop production team Stock, Aitken And Waterman were the kings of the UK charts. Thanks to scoring shitloads of mega-hits with artists such as Kylie Minogue, Bananarama and Rick Astley, they were also widely hated and scorned for their factory production line approach to making music and its overpowering ubiquity on the airwaves. Metal fans, in particular, were not at all in favour of S/A/W and it's no idle boast to claim that literally no one wanted the six-legged cash cow to go anywhere near any of our favourite bands.

So quite what possessed Judas Priest to nip over to a studio in France to work on some songs with the creators of *Never Gonna Give You Up* remains a mystery. But it's an actual thing that actually happened. As frontman Rob Halford revealed in a 1988 interview, Priest recorded three songs with their unlikely collaborators toward the end of sessions for *Ram It Down*. And, despite what you might assume, Rob believes the songs were actually pretty decent.

"They're hidden away in a vault in our office in London, and some day, at some point, people will hear them – it's just getting the timing right," the singer noted. "They're three very powerful songs, you know, so maybe you'll hear them in 1990 or the year 2000, I don't know. We would like people to hear them, because I think people are very curious about what's happening and we had a fantastic time with them…"

In fact, 60 seconds of one of the songs – a cover of soul crew The Stylistics' *You Are Everything* – emerged online in the summer of 2015 and you can still hear it on YouTube. It's a bit odd and undeniably misconceived, but not quite as horrifying as you may have predicted. What we really want to hear is the two other songs the band recorded, S/A/W-penned numbers *Runaround* and *I Will Return*, which guitarist Glenn Tipton described in a 1988 interview as "two real good rock tracks". That sounds vaguely promising, right?

Actually, maybe we don't want to hear them. Or maybe we do. Arghh, it's all so very confusing.

"THE SONGS ARE HIDDEN AWAY IN A VAULT IN LONDON"

ROB HALFORD

GETTY

VELVET REVOLVER

The dormant supergroup once jammed with Corey Taylor – we need to hear this someday

AFTER Scott Weiland was fired from supergroup Velvet Revolver in 2008, some big stars auditioned for the vacant vocalist spot. One such hopeful was Corey Taylor, who tried out for the band in 2010 but was ultimately unsuccessful – Slash admitted he thought his vocal style was ultimately too "macho" for the band's snake-hipped hard rock.

In an instalment of Loudwire's Wikipedia: Fact Or Fiction? series, Corey confirmed he'd recorded "nine or 10" original tracks with Slash, Duff McKagan, Matt Sorum and Dave Kushner, although the demo has been consigned to the vaults. "There were three songs we wrote together, which were pretty sweet, and there was a handful that I kind of rearranged based on music that they already had," he said. Although Corey said he'd love to dust off the tracks and have another crack at perfecting them, don't get your hopes up, as he also said, "the world will probably never hear them".

SLIPKNOT

How Clown's splinter group recorded their own material during the All Hope Is Gone period

AS WE DROOL in anticipation of a new Slipknot album, it's worth remembering that there is *another* album still awaiting release. As Shawn 'Clown' Crahan explained to *Hammer* last November, four members of the band – Clown, Corey Taylor, Jim Root and Sid Wilson – recorded a batch of additional material during the sessions for 2008's *All Hope Is Gone*. One song, *Til We Die*, emerged on a special edition of the album, but the rest remains in the 'Knot vaults.

"I've held on to them for 10 years because it hasn't been right," Clown said. "And I'm going to let you know now that it's feeling right. Is it Slipknot? No, it's not Slipknot. Is it four members of Slipknot? Yes. It's four members of Slipknot. Is it music being written at the same time as *All Hope Is Gone*? Absolutely." Whatever it is, we want it. Just saying.

ZACK DE LA ROCHA

The ex-Rage frontman has been working on solo material for years, yet it's been subject to mysterious delays

WHILE HIS FORMER bandmates have been ever-present with the likes of Audioslave and Prophets Of Rage, vocalist Zack de la Rocha has been mostly absent since Rage Against The Machine's demise – although he did join in with the reunion shows. Remarkably, the last studio album the firebrand appeared on was covers record *Renegades* in 2000. There has been the odd flash of excitement, with guest appearances and the *One Day As A Lion* EP with QOTSA drummer Jon Theodore, but the elephants in the room are Zack's much-anticipated collaboration with Trent Reznor and a solo album that have yet to surface in their entirety.

Don't hold your breath waiting for the Trent material – the sole track to emerge from those sessions was *We Want It All*, from 2004's *Songs And Artists That Inspired Fahrenheit 9/11*. The solo album, however, has been achingly within reach as recently as 2016, with the emergence of single *Digging For Windows*, produced by Run The Jewels' El-P. On Zack's habit for keeping fans waiting, Trent told MTV: "Over time, I think it was a matter of Zack not knowing what direction to go. He wants to make an important statement when he makes it. And he will when he gets around to making it."

Korn circa 2005: kan they kover any more klassics?

KORN

The Bakersfield nu metallers have long talked-up a covers album... obviously spelled with a 'k'

ALRIGHT, KORN'S VERSION of *Word Up!* didn't set the world on fire, but we still reckon it's a banger. Nonetheless, 15 years ago, there were rumblings of a full-on, nu metalified covers record, naturally dubbed *Korn Kovers*. And that piqued interest – candidates included Nine Inch Nails' *Head Like A Hole*, Black Sabbath's *Paranoid* and, er, the brooding *God Of Emptiness* by death metal legends Morbid Angel, which was allegedly tracked during 1999's *Issues* sessions.

On that unreleased NIN cover, vocalist Jonathan Davis got his knickers in a Twist, Twist, Twist over the verses. As guitarist Munky teased at the time, "Jonathan originally sang the verses and he just was bugging out because he wasn't enunciating the way Trent Reznor, on that song, does the original. It was really just kind of difficult for him. So we thought, 'Well, you know what? That may work out if Chester [Bennington] sang on the verse.'" And it did, the late Linkin Park frontman proclaiming it "awesome".

Originally slated to arrive in 2005, between *Take A Look In The Mirror* and *See You On The Other Side*'s album cycles, *Korn Kovers* died a slow death. Bits and pieces emerged, like Public Enemy's *Fight The Power* and The Psychedelic Furs' *Love My Way* – and *Hammer* managed to snag their recording of Faith No More's *We Care A Lot*, which took centre stage on our *Decades Of Destruction* tribute disc for the mag's 30th anniversary in 2016.

Last year, Jonathan detailed the project's (sort-of) resurrection, mentioning Korn had worked on the Charlie Daniels Band's *The Devil Went Down To Georgia*. When pressed on other titles, he told journalist Matt Pinfield, "We're still picking [covers] – it's been a work in progress for a long time. But whenever we get a little free time, we go ahead and do a couple songs. One day it'll see the light of day."

We're not holding our breath, mate.

"WHEN WE GET FREE TIME, WE DO A COUPLE OF SONGS"

JONATHAN DAVIS

PRESS

Deftones, with Chi Cheng, second left, in February 2007

DEFTONES

Eros was shelved after bassist Chi Cheng's tragic accident, leaving fans wondering what might have been

IN CONTRAST TO the tumultuous recording environment for 2006's *Saturday Night Wrist*, the atmosphere had completely shifted when Deftones began to write what should have been their sixth album in 2008. "We were getting along so well during the *Eros* sessions. It's like the music actually was even taking a backseat to our friendships," Chino Moreno told journalist Matt Pinfield in 2016. "We'd go into the studio, and we were way into playing the board game Risk at the time, so we'd set up this elaborate game of Risk that would last for weeks at a time. Terry Date was producing that record and he'd come in and be like, 'C'mon guys, let's get to work' and we'd be like, 'One more game.' We were having so much fun together as friends and reconnecting – then during those sessions is when Chi had his accident."

The album that emerged from the sessions, titled *Eros*, was all set to be released around the turn of 2009, with a new song, *Melanie*, tested during live dates. But tragedy befell the Sacramento visionaries when bassist Chi Cheng was involved in a horrific car crash, leaving him in a semi-comatose state. Chi would sadly never recover from the crash, eventually passing away in 2013. Understandably shocked and saddened, Deftones shelved the album and started afresh, with Quicksand's Sergio Vega taking on bass duties for the exceptional *Diamond Eyes*, released in 2010. *Koi No Yokan* and *Gore* have since followed, but as of yet the *Eros* recordings remain in the Deftones vault, for the most part.

To mark the one-year anniversary of Chi's passing, Chino uploaded a song, *Smile*, to YouTube. Though it was taken down by the band's label, it's the only tantalising glimpse of an album that the band have been asked been questioned about ad nauseam in the years since, but are understandably apprehensive about revealing to the world.

In an interview with *The Independent* in 2016, Chino was still unresolved on the matter. "Musically it's probably 75-80% done and lyrically it was about halfway there, but honestly, I wasn't too happy with the material we had. Some of the music was lacking a little bit. I had faith it was going to come together and be great in the end, but we never got to that point. Once Chi had his accident, everything came to a halt with the *Eros* sessions, so the idea of going back to that batch of songs, finishing them and have Sergio learn Chi's parts just hasn't felt like something that we're interested in doing. If the record were finished and we were just sitting on it, we probably would have put it out by now, maybe even given it away, just so that people can hear it, but it would take a lot more work to get it done."

However, in 2017 drummer Abe Cunningham seemed more optimistic that Chi's final recordings could see the light of day. "If anything at all, I see some tracks from it coming out in some form or another," Abe told Irish website Overdrive. "There is some really fucking bad-ass stuff on that album, but also stuff that's not that good in my opinion. We know that there is interest in the album from the die-hards but I'm sure we will do the right thing at the right time with it… it's something that could surface in the coming years."

With the band currently expected to release album number nine before the year's end, it seems Deftones are too busy to tidy up *Eros* for the time being. But compared to other albums, the door certainly seems far from shut on the final material recorded by Chi and his friends in those halcyon days of creativity and reconciliation.

"THERE IS SOME FUCKING BAD-ASS STUFF ON THERE"

ABE CUNNINGHAM

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MONSTERS'

BRAWL

It was supposed to be one of the biggest tours of the 90s. But when Marilyn Manson teamed up with Hole, it descended into total chaos

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

GETTY

Brian's always taken Dress Down Sundays a bit liberally

When two giants in rock join forces, the results are often explosive. Think Ozzy and Mötley Crüe's ant-sniffing, piss-licking one-upmanship, or Metallica butting heads with Guns N' Roses in the early 90s. But no tour – and no clash of egos – can match 1999's aptly dubbed Beautiful Monsters tour, featuring a co-headlining bill of Marilyn Manson and Courtney Love's grunge rockers, Hole. With stoner rock hellraisers Monster Magnet added as openers at Manson's request, the tour was unmatched for debauchery, chaos and pure, outright hostility.

"I knew it was going to be a complete fucking disaster," chuckles Monster Magnet frontman Dave Wyndorf today. "I knew these people were going to go tooth and nail. We had the easy job: play a short set, then sit back and watch the fireworks every night." Thirty-seven dates were booked. Only nine were completed. And they became nine of the most notorious shows in rock history.

In the week of October 3, 1998, Hole's *Celebrity Skin* and Marilyn Manson's *Mechanical Animals* were both in the US Billboard charts, sitting at No.10 and No.1 respectively. Both records were produced by Michael Beinhorn, who was given unobstructed access to how both Courtney and Manson operated.

"In the period leading up to *Celebrity Skin*, Courtney was a dynamo," he tells us. "It didn't matter what anyone said to her, she could take that energy and turn it into something that'd make her go even more. Manson had his persona and the concept for his album mapped; *Mechanical Animals* wasn't as gritty and biting as *Antichrist Superstar*, but the power is in the depth of emotion."

To capitalise on *Celebrity Skin*'s success, Hole's management, Q-Prime, were keen on sending the band out on a joint tour with someone of similar scale. Still, the idea that these two disparate artists would join forces seemed absurd.

"Here you had two artists that were going for the brass ring in very different ways," says former MTV staff writer Gil Kaufman. "Manson was in his glam metal apex and was being as debauched as he could, while Courtney had become a star, with a Golden Globe nomination [for 1996 biographical drama *The People vs. Larry Flynt*], and she'd made a much slicker pop album. She was trying to be the ultimate Californian rock star."

"Courtney was transitioning from her movie success, back to her job as a rock musician," adds ex-Hole guitarist Eric Erlandson. "She didn't seem truly happy with the realities of the music industry at that time. Also, I knew Manson was more in the metal, coke and groupies

GETTY

vein. A sweet puppy with some shiny fake fangs. Ambitious and mischievous, friendly, but high school cruel as well."

It didn't help that there was a public feud between the two artists, born from comments in Manson's 1998 book, *The Long Hard Road Out Of Hell*, about the Hole singer. He'd insinuated that Courtney had no interest in talking to him until he became famous; she'd responded by referring to Manson as 'Brian' in interviews. Despite this, Q-Prime aggressively pursued Manson to join the tour. "I was hesitant," Eric tells us. "We weren't a good match."

"This was the managers' and booking agents' idea," Dave Wyndorf chuckles. "Those bands needed each other to fill those stadiums and arenas, the managers knew that, but their egos wouldn't allow them to admit it."

Despite initial reservations, a deal was struck and the dates were announced. Manson set the tone before the tour even started by claiming Hole were "the last band in the world I'd ever, ever want to tour with. But I love a challenge."

"We just wanted to tour the record," says ex-Manson keyboardist Stephen Bier, AKA Madonna Wayne Gacy. "Management, record labels, they all said it was a good idea. I didn't have a problem with it, but Brian and her have pretty big egos, so I knew something was going to happen."

"I remember thinking, 'There's no way these two maniacs are going to make it,'" Gil says. "Someone is going to piss someone off. It's going to be impossible, but it could also be a really fun, bizarre night at the opera. They knew that, if they were out on tour together, people wouldn't be able to take their eyes off of them."

The Beautiful Monsters tour opened for business on February 28, 1999 at the Spokane Arena, Washington. Immediately, there was tension. "How could there not be?" Eric laughs.

"She started out doing some really cool punk rock shit; we all loved the first Hole record," says Stephen. "But she came off as this Hollywood, celebrity-loving kinda thing, which I found very strange. She had a private chef, a yoga instructor and this whole Hollywood entourage, which didn't seem very rock'n'roll to me. She was more like an actress playing at being a rock star than a rock star that had become an actress."

"They had to do certain interviews together and they acted all chummy," belly-laughs Dave. "It was like *The Godfather*; you keep your friends close and your enemies closer. It started as gentle ribbing onstage and it just got worse. Manson is better at that stuff than Courtney."

GETTY

Hole had a very different idea of partying to Manson and co

"I KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE A FUCKING DISASTER"

DAVE WYNDORF, MONSTER MAGNET

Additionally, the odd couple mentality had spread from backstage areas and gossip columns and into the crowd.

"I reviewed the show at the Cow Palace in San Francisco," Gil tells us. "Manson's fans were these cyber-goth, Nine Inch Nails-type guys, whereas Hole had, I guess you'd describe them as 'Coachella babies'. Indie rock, hipster. It was like a high school party where you have two sets of people that really don't get along. After the show I had to get a few 'man on the street' interviews for the piece. It was such a dichotomy; Manson fans saying 'Hole suck! They were boring!' and Hole fans were saying Manson was gross and a pig. It was as if management had scripted it for them."

Confrontation reared its head as early as the second night, in Vancouver, with Love running onstage and jumping on Manson's back after a snarky comment was directed at her. Later in Manson's set, he took a tumble, injuring his wrist and storming off during the encore. The bad blood escalated at pace.

"She had this chef that we had to help pay for, and we saw that as extraneous," claims Stephen. "Yet she refused to pay for Monster Magnet, because she didn't like them. We went, 'Fuck it! We'll pay for Monster Magnet.' She really didn't like that. But they were killing it every night! We'd get onstage and deliberately try and do anything to piss her off."

"It was less rock'n'roll and more 50s TV show," Dave Wyndorf sniggers. "These two huge stars were shouting obscenities at each other. She'd turn up and scream, 'You bum! You're nothing!' at him. Like a Western, there wasn't enough room for two sheriffs in town."

The two bands also had different approaches to the touring lifestyle. Manson's success gave him a platform to live out his most decadent rock star fantasies. Courtney, having previously been to rehab, and her band were appalled. "I was disappointed to see that 80s LA hair metal mentality was back in full force," sighs Eric.

"A lot of our fans aren't allowed to come because parents are scared of Brian and his burning cross," Courtney told MTV. "The other night Twiggy [Ramirez, ex-Manson bassist] vomited onstage. I was like, 'I'm on a tour with people that are vomiting onstage.' The culture around the drug they use makes people weird and different. They do a lot of coke and it's really 70s; it turns people into amoral porno watchers who make bad jokes."

"It was no different to any of the tours I did with the band," says Stephen. "But she didn't like it. It was ironic, because when we first saw her when she was going out with Trent and we were on the NIN tour, she'd turn up on our bus wasted. Five years later, she's turning her nose up at us being a rock'n'roll band; the reason you're in a band is so you can get fucked up on a Wednesday. But suddenly it's beneath her?"

Unsurprisingly, Monster Magnet were in the Manson camp when it came to the access to excess. "The aftershow parties were something else!" Dave screams. "Manson would take control. He walked it like he talked it, and you'd see orgies of destruction! There were rooms filled with girls in leather nun outfits doing each other. It was like Led Zeppelin in 1973. I thought, 'Well, I'm finally here.' I'd found my home."

The barbs being thrown around during the sets increased in savagery. Manson threatened to make Courtney his sacrificial cow. She called Manson "some fucking guy with a blue head [and] a big sign that says, 'Drugs'." By this point, the tour was gaining more press for what was happening between the two singers than for the music.

When Manson returned to action, the Beautiful Monsters tour was dead. His band resumed the tour under the Rock Is Dead banner, but Hole were off it for good. Since then, both bands' legacies have had significant ups and downs.

"Our label, Geffen, was in the process of being swallowed up by Interscope, which was more rap and metal focused," Eric shrugs. "We fired our lawyer, we never finished the tour, Melissa [Auf Der Maur, Hole bassist] joined Smashing Pumpkins and the band was essentially over by the end of '99. Hello PTSD!"

"When *Mechanical Animals* came out, the projected sales figure for the first week was 300,000 copies," says Michael Beinhorn. "BMG were excited, saying, 'We're going to hit No.1 and sell 300k!'. It sold 230,000 and got to No.1, but it wasn't enough. The label lost interest, they took down the huge billboard they had in Times Square for the album, the president of the label called Manson up, screaming at him for having tits on the cover. I think that, and what happened at Columbine, which really affected him emotionally, meant that he never made an album up to the standard of *Mechanical Animals* or *Antichrist Superstar* again. He just didn't get the support."

"MARILYN MANSON WAS BEING AS DEBAUCHED AS HE COULD"

GIL KAUFMAN, EX-MTV

"The two of them had never met a controversy they couldn't stir up," Gil says. "They both wanted headlines, they both wanted to be the biggest rock star in the world. How do you do that? By sucking all the oxygen out of the room and leaving nothing for anyone else."

As predicted, it couldn't last. Hole played their final show of the tour on March 14, at the Inglewood Forum. Their reasoning: the 50/50 split of costs between the two artists, when Manson had a bigger production. During Manson's set that night, he slipped onstage, hairline fracturing his ankle and suspending the shows as a result.

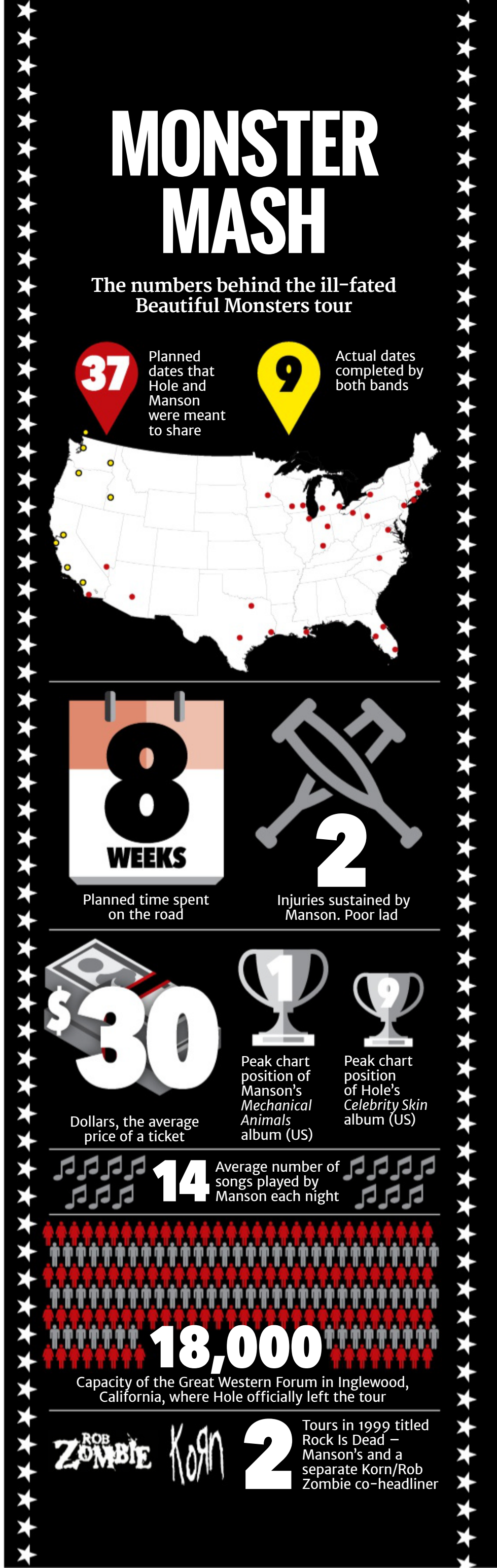
"He injured it earlier in the tour," says Stephen. "He was struggling on, but it ended up being the second time that we had to cancel a show in LA, which was obviously very frustrating. I went to see Henry Rollins do a spoken-word show the night we were meant to be playing, and he was being a real dick about it. I had to listen to people laughing at us."

"It's sad to see Courtney become this Hollywood Boulevard character," Gil adds. "She's become this strange figure in the industry that was legendary for a while and then lost her purpose."

These days, they appear to have buried their differences, the Hole singer recently starring in Manson's video for *Tattooed In Reverse*. But it's hard not to look back at their tour of tabloid notoriety, and long for the drama, myths and music they helped to create.

"Decadent. Over-commercialised. Over-stylised. Greedy. Empty. Vacuous. The last hurrah," is how Eric remembers the tour. "It was that end of the century thing. I'm not sure we were aware of it at the time, but the general mood was, 'Let's live it up before the apocalypse.'"

"Gasoline with an open flame can't help but combust," Gil shrugs. "That was the genius of that tour. You never knew whether or not it was going to be the last night. Who knew what was going to happen? Whatever it was, you knew you'd have a story to tell."



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How DEATH GOSPEL Took Over The UNDERGROUND

It can barely be described as 'metal' and most of its standard bearers refuse to even acknowledge its existence. So why has death gospel got the extreme metal world talking?

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY

Over the past decade, an influx of singer-songwriters has been infiltrating the metal world and reinventing the idea of what constitutes heavy music. Artists like Chelsea Wolfe, Emma Ruth Rundle, A.A. Williams and Louise Lemón, not to mention Marissa Nadler, Anna von Hausswolff and Nicole Sabouné, are all embracing darkness in a raw, visceral way, pushing boundaries of genre and style. Though none of them play metal, they have been embraced by metal's fanbase, touring and collaborating with metal bands and playing festivals like Roadburn.

No stranger to *Hammer* since her official debut, *The Grime And The Glow*, in 2010, California-born artist Chelsea Wolfe has been at the forefront of this influx. She grew up surrounded by country and folk, and while elements of these find their way into her transcendental and often eerie sounds, the influence of doom and goth are equally evident. Her metal ties are strong: she's supported A Perfect Circle, worked with the likes of Chino Moreno, Converge and Deafheaven, and her most recent album, 2017's *Hiss Spun*, might be her heaviest yet.

"All these amazing, talented women are just blowing up their own boundaries and the boundaries society tries to place on them, making music that transcends genre, and creating a powerful energy in which someone drawn to the intensity of metal can find something to relate to," Chelsea says.

"None of us necessarily *love* to be compared to the other," she adds, "but it's natural for journalists to group

A.A.WILLIAMS: PRESS/ MARC TROJANOWSKI

A.A. Williams

musicians together who might be on some kind of zeitgeist wavelength."

While they express great respect and admiration for one another, Chelsea, A.A., Emma and Louise also feel frustration at being constantly compared as artists, particularly comparisons made about the actual *sound* of their music.

"I do recognise this trend, that there are women making music that isn't metal who are being embraced by this world," says Emma Ruth Rundle. "But I don't think in a music sense that we are similar at all. I can't tell you how frustrating it is to be lumped in with the same few people again and again. I would like my music to be more like 40 Watt Sun, or Patrick Walker's [other band] Warning: that sort of very raw, emotional music."

For Emma, though, the metal world is not unfamiliar. After growing up in a musical household in Los Angeles – "My parents were really into rock music – the first music I have a memory of is Depeche Mode" – she started out playing in post-rock bands like Red Sparowes and Marriages. But it's her solo work, the most recent of which is her gorgeously affecting, raw and dark fifth album *On Dark Horses*, released last year, that she is best known for.

"I would say I am a metalhead," Emma says, adding that sludge band Thou will be coming over the next day to work on their upcoming collaboration. Emma thinks such collaborations, plus her musical CV, are part of the reason the metal world has embraced her.

"Maybe people who were tuned into heavy music continue to follow my work after those bands," she says. "I think I've been treated very well by the world of heavy music; I feel at home in that world. I think heavy content music is able to live alongside heavy sonic music," she adds. "Carrying heavy lyrical feeling and emotion can hold its place alongside bands that have heavy riffs and 20 amps."

"My [debut] EP has been out for just over two months, and only twice has it been compared to a male artist," says London-based singer A.A. Williams. "It's always compared to people like Chelsea Wolfe, Marissa Nadler, Emma Ruth Rundle. And that's great – they're fabulous artists. But no one can see past it.

"I'm not pissed off about it," she says carefully, "but it is frustrating. When I played ArcTanGent festival, there was a sign for my show saying something like, 'For Fans Of: Neurosis, Isis and Radiohead.' And I just thought,

Chelsea Wolfe

'Thank you!'" she laughs. "It's great to be compared to fabulous female artists… but can we not focus on the music itself!?"

As a metalhead, A.A. is thrilled that her stripped-back, dark folk-tinged self-titled debut EP is being embraced by the metal world: "I love it!" she says. "It makes me so happy." She'll also be opening for Amenra at their 20th anniversary acoustic London show this May. Before this, A.A. worked as a classically trained cellist – until fate intervened. She found a discarded guitar on her road in London with a sign 'Please take me' under the strings, and decided to take it on as a project.

"I had kind of resigned myself to, quite happily, performing for other people," A.A. explains. "But I had always felt a bit out of place because I was the person doing classical music who was also into Meshuggah or whatever. But now, I feel like not fitting in has finally brought me to this point.

"I can understand why people who listen to heavy music have embraced my music," she continues. "Even though it might not be as loud or as fast, I think in the softer sections of a lot of heavier artists, you'll find similarities to what I'm doing; bands like Cult Of Luna, or Amenra. I can see why metal fans have been drawn to it. That," she laughs, "and it's gloomy and slow!"

"THESE WOMEN ARE BLOWING UP BOUNDARIES"

CHELSEA WOLFE

Unlike the other artists, Swedish singer Louise Lemón doesn't identify as a metalhead, but is happy to have found a home in that realm. Her musician father played bongos in 70s psychedelic band Yellow Dog, and she grew up in a household soundtracked by The Beatles, Prince and Swedish pop.

"I thought a lot about the kind of music I wanted to make," explains Louise, whose foray into the heavier side came from bands like Nirvana and Soundgarden when she was a teenager. "I've always had eclectic tastes: I've taken in a lot of pop, soul, rock… and it took me a while to find a place where I could write something really honest – that was actually coming out of *me*."

CHELSEA WOLFE: PRESS/ZOHN MANDEL

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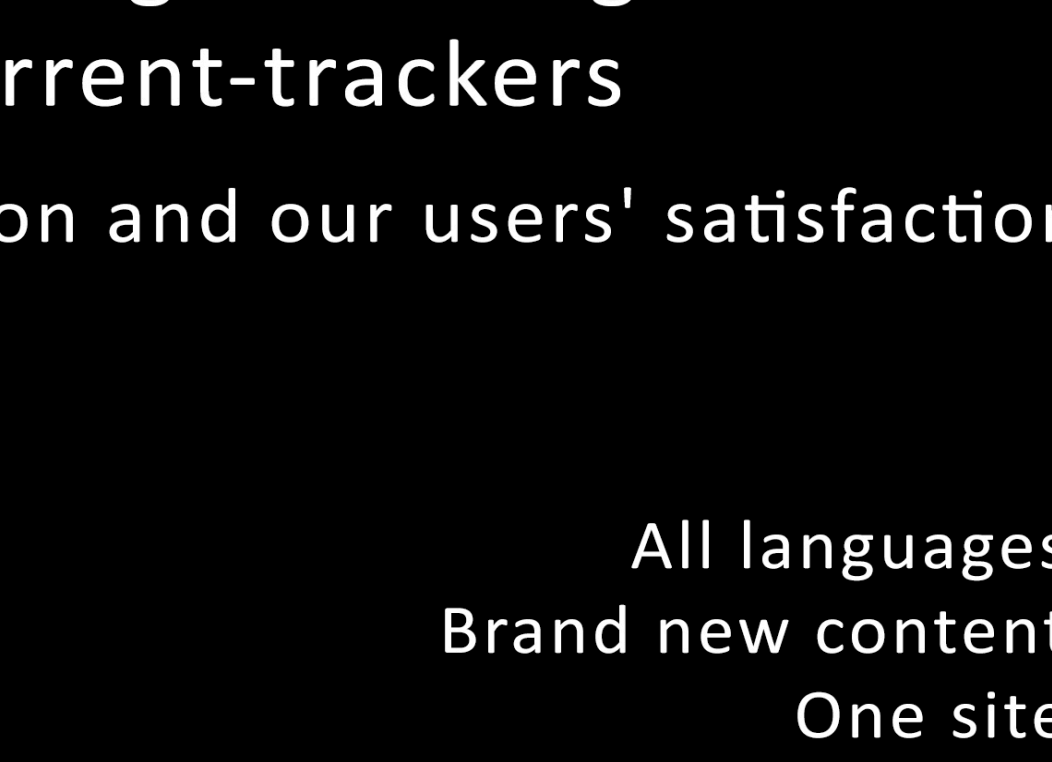

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“I HAD TO GOOGLE ‘DEATH GOSPEL’”

A.A. WILLIAMS

The result was her enchanting 2017 debut album *Purge*, and she’s just released her second, *A Broken Heart Is An Open Heart*.

“If we were male, we would not be compared to each other,” Louise says when asked if she thinks there is a new movement. “They’re awesome, but we are very different, and inspired by such different kinds of music.”

One term that has been floated recently in an attempt to categorise these artists is ‘death gospel’. It arguably started with Louise: a writer used the term reviewing one of her early live shows. She thought that it fit her music well, so she embraced it.

“It’s dark and heavy, but it’s still pop,” Louise explains. “I think it’s a good description, and I don’t feel it puts boundaries on me.”

It’s also been associated with A.A.’s music. “I had to Google ‘death gospel’,” she laughs. “To me, gospel equals truth. So I suppose you are looking at something that is not necessarily religious, but is raw, simple and true.”

Is it something that the others feel an affinity with, though? “That’s not a genre title I’m fond of,” says Emma. “Referring to ‘gospel’ feels like a misappropriation. Gospel has a complex history and evolution, cultural importance and is religious in nature – it’s worship music and to call on it as a descriptor seems a little frivolous to me.”

“I don’t love putting labels on everything, but I can see how someone might categorise my music that way,” says Chelsea. “In the past I’ve called my music ‘dark folk’ or ‘experimental rock’n’roll’ because as a musician you get asked to describe your music all the time even though you want it to speak for itself!”

Is the need to label everything just another part of the job?

“I think genres are more useful for people who are listening than people who are creating,” says A.A. “It’s a useful comparison for somebody who doesn’t know the music.”

“People have to [label music] to convey it to someone who hasn’t heard it,” adds Emma. “Whether it’s ‘folk-gaze’, ‘metal folk’, ‘grunge shoegaze acoustic’, that’s something every musician just has to deal with. It doesn’t bother me: if anything I find it kind of cute or entertaining. I understand that it serves a purpose: I’m not concerned with trying to control how people describe my music.”

Louise Lemón

LOUISE LEMÓN: PRESS/SOPHIE WINBERG TYRFELT

Ultimately, it isn’t an exact sound that these artists share. Instead, what links them, along with captivating the metal audience, is their ability to really get under their listeners’ skin by personal topics in their lyrics and reaching out with a raw and often vulnerable sound.

“I’ve spent way too long pretending not to be raw and vulnerable,” says A.A. firmly. “And I thought, ‘Fuck it!’ I just want to do what feels right. And that’s what this is.

“A lot of my music is looking inward, and about grappling with a mind that doesn’t necessarily do what you want it to do,” she continues. “I try to write fairly plainly, I think it’s important to have something that people feel an affinity with. I would say my songs are personal, and come across as quite raw sometimes. But not in a harsh way. I don’t want to write music that you don’t have a personal attachment to.”

Louise’s music examines one topic in particular, a subject she describes as “old as humanity,” and one that everyone can relate to: heartbreak.

“In a way, it is almost more intense than love,” Louise muses. “It’s also

a feeling that's hard to escape, and it's hard to explain. So for me, a way to try to understand it is to write about it, because then you own it in a way."

Emma's fans have followed her journey through her intense lyrical themes that deal with family tensions, addiction, mental health, loss and death. Though intensely personal for her, they are themes she describes as "earnest human feelings": "For my solo work, I wanted to make music that was more intimate," she explains. "Just very simple experiences of being human, and finding ways to deal with my set of issues.

"It's what I do, and it's the essence of what my work has become," she says of her raw lyrics. "It's strange to be exposed in some ways, but I think it's my strength as an artist.

"I think that's the main thing that [my listeners] connect with," she says. "I don't think people are listening because they think I have a nice voice."

"I'm an empath, so I feel others' energies very strongly," Chelsea explains of her lyrics, that explore themes like spirituality, cycles of nature, dreams and sleep paralysis. "Even when I write outside of myself, attempting to put myself in someone else's shoes who is suffering, I'm still looking at it through the lens of my own experiences. Before I wrote music I wrote poetry. As I started setting the words to music, my purpose called to me. Writing has always been my way of connecting to the world."

"I SPENT TOO LONG PRETENDING NOT TO BE VULNERABLE"
A.A. WILLIAMS

"If more women are taking their place here and exploring darker themes, maybe it's more of a change in society," concludes Louise thoughtfully. "We are letting ourselves do that, the music business is allowing it, and it's not about just being a woman who's 'happy' or trying to satisfy someone in some way.

"I don't think it's just about confidence: it's about getting that space," she continues. "You can have confidence and the best ideas, but if you don't get space to speak, no one will hear you."

"It's natural that a group of people of a certain era will be inspired by the greats before, and so craft a kind of family of music, even if they don't know the other exists, all while reflecting the current times," adds Chelsea.

Whatever the reasons, the fact that there are more women exploring darkness in unique ways and finding a place in metal is in itself a cause for celebration.

"I suppose if you look at the fact that we're even discussing this, it's a good thing," A.A. says. "Ten or 15 years ago, it probably wouldn't be happening. Maybe we've just been grouped together for now: maybe later down the line we will separate ourselves."

"The perspective of women and non-gender-conforming artists is a very important one," Chelsea says, "and I think people see that."

CHELSEA WOLFE'S *HISS SPUN* IS OUT NOW VIA SARGENT HOUSE. LOUISE LEMÓN'S *A BROKEN HEART IS AN OPEN HEART* IS OUT NOW VIA ICONS CREATING EVIL ART. A.A. WILLIAMS' SELF-TITLED DEBUT EP IS OUT NOW VIA HOLY ROAR. EMMA RUTH RUNDLE'S *ON DARK HORSES* IS OUT NOW VIA SARGENT HOUSE

Emma Ruth Rundle

Original SINNERS

Some of the key predecessors for the death gospel phenomenon

THROWING MUSES
Throwing Muses' primal alt-rock with a post-punk edge blew up in the 80s and early 90s. Kristin Hersh's raw, mercurial and often quite terrifying voice was the focus, and she was dealing with bipolar disorder. Hersh is still making music: she released her 10th solo album, *Possible Dust Clouds*, in 2018.

DIAMANDA GALÁS
"It doesn't get more extreme than Diamanda..." Emma Ruth Rundle isn't wrong. The Greek-American dramatic soprano's highly original and often political works are magnified by her extraordinary and spine-chilling vocals. Her impact on the heavy music world is more than evident: she played Roadburn in 2016.

JARBOE
New Orleans-born Jarboe is perhaps best-known for her work alongside and within avant-garde experimental rock band Swans, but her haunting, gospel-style vocals took centre-stage in an extensive solo catalogue, and she has worked with artists like Neurosis and Justin Broadrick.

LAURA NYRO
Laura Nyro's enigmatic sounds that encapsulated doo wop, pop and jazz had an eerie edge, particularly in the unguarded emotional scope of 1969's *New York Tendaberry*. She influenced musicians from Elton John to Todd Rundgren and found unlikely fans in Kiss and Alice Cooper, but sadly passed away from cancer in 1997 at the age of 49.

EMMA RUTH RUNDLE: PRESS/KRISTIN COFER

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Serial Thrillers

Last month, the music world united in mourning the death of The Prodigy's Keith Flint. From smashing clubs to headlining Download, here's how a group of ravers from Essex captured metal's hearts and minds

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

There'll never be another 'Keef', seen here at Italy's Heineken Jammin' Festival, 2012

REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

It was when gifted young pianist Liam Howlett started making music from samplers and DJing clubs in Essex during the late 80s that he caught the ear of local raver Keith Flint, who requested a mixtape of his work. The tape, with the legend 'Prodigy' scrawled on it, convinced Keith to persuade his new friend to form a band. These were the early days of rave culture and, as Britain's second Summer Of Love swung to its euphoric new sounds, the duo enlisted dancer Leeroy Thornhill and MC Keith 'Maxim Reality' Palmer, and The Prodigy were born.

Much like punk just over a decade before, rave felt like a genuine anti-authoritarian movement, driven by a DIY ethic and disgust at the country's governmental regime. Rave used illegal free parties and a message of peace and love to kick back against the last days of Thatcherite Britain, Poll Tax riots, mass unemployment, football hooliganism and ever-growing commercialism. The Prodigy's debut album, 1992's *Experience*, was an off-kilter and brilliantly uplifting love letter to that culture but, for all of rave's subversive qualities, it lacked the genuine anger and power of the rock bands from that era – the likes of Rage Against The Machine, Sepultura and Helmet carrying heavy music forwards furiously and urgently. It was something that The Prodigy longed to capture.

"It was really on *Music For The Jilted Generation* [1994] when things started to change," says Gizz Butt, the band's original live guitarist in the late 90s. "I talked to Liam and he was in awe of Rage Against The Machine. He used to look at Tom Morello like he was a god! They wanted that; they wanted their music to inspire that kind of energy. That album was when Liam started to write with more rock- and metal-based song structures in his mind."

...Jilted Generation made huge waves in the burgeoning dance scene, chart hits like *Voodoo People* and *Poison* becoming setlist staples for decades, but it wasn't until The Prodigy returned in 1996 with *Firestarter*, the first song fronted by Keith, that the metal scene really began to take notice. Its infamous video, featuring Keith premiering his iconic 'demon clown' look and terrorising a disused tube station in stark black and white, drew a record number of complaints after scaring *Top Of The Pops* viewers to death. Bolstered by the controversy, it topped the UK album charts. The Prodigy were suddenly the most dangerous band in music.

"That's when it all changed," chuckles Gizz. "Suddenly you had Rage Against

The Prodigy (left to right), circa 1995: Maxim Reality, Liam Howlett, Leeroy Thornhill, Keith Flint

The Machine and Fear Factory and Biohazard and all of these bands telling us how great they thought we were."

Although many of the bands of the time were on board, some metallers treated The Prodigy with everything from suspicion to hostility.

"The punks looked at us and got it straight away," Gizz smiles. "But, yeah, the metal fans were harder to please. They looked at the keyboards and... well, the keyboard isn't a very metal instrument, is it? There were people that closed the door on it just because of the set-up."

But one thing that can always win over rock fans is the ability to put on a live show, and The Prodigy's gigs were becoming the stuff of legend. Their rabble-rousing carnivals of oppressive lights and booming, sonic detonation, Maxim, Keith and Leeroy's onstage antics whipping crowds into a frenzy, were a million miles away from the typical 'two faceless blokes behind some decks' of most dance acts, and began to appeal to fans of all things heavy.

"LIAM WAS IN AWE OF RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE"

ORIGINAL PRODIGY GUITARIST GIZZ BUTT

"Those acts just don't have the edge, the raw power and energy like The Prodigy have," shrugs recent Prodigy guitarist Rob Holliday by way of explanation. "That's just a fact."

"One day someone played me this footage of The Prodigy at this festival in Russia and I just didn't even know what I was seeing," says Ho9909's theOGM, whose band supported them on their last run of UK dates, and who openly admits how big a role Flint and co. played in inspiring them to meld rock and metal with other, disparate sounds.

The momentum building was unstoppable, and after detonating Reading Festival's main stage in 1996, scoring another No.1 single with *Breathe* and heading out on a totally sold-out European Tour – supported by Foo Fighters, no less – The Prodigy found themselves headlining the Friday night of Glastonbury in June 1997, three days before the release of their third album, *The Fat Of The Land*.

By now you'll know of that record's impact. Its clash of sounds captured the imagination of music lovers from all walks of life. It hit No. 1 in the album charts on both sides of the Atlantic, selling more than 10 million copies to date. The album's third single, *Smack My Bitch Up*, earned the band more controversy thanks to its subversive video. Quite simply, *The Fat Of The Land* turned The Prodigy into cultural icons.

"I can remember the exact moment when it we all realised it was something truly special," Gizz tells us. "We played the [90s UK event] Phoenix Festival and I was getting ready to do my bit of *Firestarter*, and I looked over and David Bowie was stood there banging his head. Then you look out and there are 60,000 people all going absolutely crazy as far as the eye can see. You don't forget that."

It wasn't all plain sailing, though. After such a zeitgeist-capturing album and phenomenal success, a millstone was hanging around the band's necks. During the ensuing years, the internal struggle and pressure to follow *The Fat Of The Land* grew. Leeroy left the band, and an entire album's worth of

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The Prodigy always raised the roof when they played live. Resistance was futile

material was scrapped by Liam. "I was being overcome by it all – it was all too much," he told *Sound On Sound* magazine in 2004. "I used to go to bed every night thinking, 'Tomorrow I'm going to write the tune. Tomorrow is the day.' But nothing ever happened."

Meanwhile, the rock scene was moving on. It now had a whole new group of freaks that could go toe-to-toe with The Prodigy: from the nihilistic, nine-man waking nightmare of Slipknot, to the wildly unpredictable oddballs in System Of A Down, to the world-burning pyrotechnics of Rammstein. Metal had taken The Prodigy's tricks and co-opted them for its own ends. When fourth album *Always Outnumbered, Never Outgunned* arrived in 2004, it was met with lukewarm reviews. Had The Prodigy peaked? Ironically, their redemption lay in the scene that had initially treated them with the most suspicion.

In 2006, Download booker Andy Copping was looking for a second stage headliner for the Sunday night of his festival. Having seen the band on numerous occasions, he decided to take a risk and approach The Prodigy.

"I knew that the Download crowd would at least give them a chance," Andy tells us. "And I'd seen them, so I knew what was going to happen. I took an unbelievable amount of stick for that – people were calling for my head, they were saying that I'd gone mad!" "This felt slightly different," Rob Holliday admits. "There was an edginess. We could see it in each other's eyes."

What happened next has passed into Download folklore.

"Even I never expected the absolute carnage that happened that evening," Andy says, puffing out his cheeks. "I left a little early to go see the start of Guns N' Roses, and I looked over at the tent after The Prodigy finished and just remember seeing these kids streaming out with sweat and steam all over them like an army, like something from *Braveheart*."

"From the second we got onstage it was total chaos," adds Rob. "The volume was insane and the heat from the audience was what I imagine being trapped in a house fire to be like. I felt like I was going to pass out, watching people clambering up tent poles and climbing up on to the roof."

The reaction put paid to any suggestion that The Prodigy didn't belong in the metal scene, and it seemed to re-energise them creatively, too. Far from being a spent force, their second wind came with the ensuing *Invaders Must Die* album in 2009. Possibly their most complete collection of songs, it took all the elements of their previous work and updated it for modern rock and electronic standards. It also spawned another banger for the ages: the anthemic *Omen*, which peaked at No.4 in the UK charts and gave the band their biggest hit single since *Breathe* back in 1996. Whether you discovered The Prodigy in the clubs of Ibiza or in a muddy field in Derbyshire, *Invaders*… was speaking your language.

The band set about decimating more festival stages around the globe over the following few years, including another stop-off at Download in 2009 and headlining their own festival, Warriors Dance, in 2010. The run would culminate in a third Download appearance that would fully induct The Prodigy into rock's upper echelons.

"It was a no-brainer to have them back," Andy Copping nods. "And there was nowhere else for them to go on that bill but right at the top."

With the success of the two previous appearances behind them, The Prodigy were announced as main stage headliners at Download 2012, appearing alongside two of the most revered bands in metal's long history: Black Sabbath and Metallica.

"They absolutely belonged with Sabbath and Metallica," Andy states. "No doubt. They cemented that legacy that night. It's still the biggest-selling Download we've ever had and The Prodigy, as first-time headliners,

WILL IRELAND

were part of that. You can't say they don't belong here."

Download 2012 is mostly remembered for the savage weather that nearly saw the entire festival shut down only hours before gates opened. But once The Prodigy set foot onstage on the Friday night, all fears of a washout evaporated.

"We pulled in and it was a total mud-pit," says Rob. "But at no point did the band think it wasn't going to happen. The Prodigy have the mentality that nothing stops a show. Simple as that."

With Download well and truly conquered, the band went on to release two more albums, 2015's *The Day Is My Enemy* and last year's *No Tourists* (rumoured to be their last, even before Keith's passing), and continued to play awe-inspiring live shows the world over, including headlining 2014's Sonisphere Festival alongside Iron Maiden and Metallica.

Last month, though, the news broke of Keith's passing. It was one of those rare occasions where the entirety of the music world felt the need to express its sadness – and metal was no exception. They may have come from rave culture, but The Prodigy were one of ours now, and we mourned them as such.

"I just feel for the fans, because right now they are broken," sighs Gizz Butt. "They've had this long journey and it's ended like this. It's so sad. Keith was not the guy you saw onstage. He was sensitive, he was kind, he was so, so funny. I have so many stories, so many memories from those days on tour. I remember when we were on tour with Foo Fighters as support and he wanted to learn how to edit the big screens that were filming the bands during the gigs, and he taught himself how to do that. He used to direct the cameras while Foo Fighters were onstage! One day I went up and played *Monkey Wrench* with them, which is obviously quite a thing to do, and Keith came up to me at the end of the tour and gave me this compilation he'd edited together of me playing the song onstage with Dave Grohl and the Foo Fighters. That's quite a thing to own, quite a memory, and I have Keith to thank for that."

As for The Prodigy themselves, it can't be understated just how unlikely it was that four ravers from Essex would make a journey that'd lead them to sharing stages with Sabbath, Maiden and Metallica – and not just surviving, but thriving. Put plainly: they changed our scene forever.

"They were their own lane," says theOGM. "To be an electronic band and to get up and fuck with all you hardcore, guitar-loving motherfuckers? Ain't no one ever done that before. To tour with them and see them every night was like being doused with musical holy water."

"They broke down barriers and showed people that you don't have to be just one thing," says Andy Copping. "They proved that all of this genre snobbery is worthless, and they never compromised. They never pandered to anyone. It all happened on their own terms. What a legacy that is." H

"TOURING WITH THEM WAS LIKE BEING DOUSED WITH HOLY WATER"

HO99O9'S THEOGM

Keith killing it with The Prodigy at Denmark's Roskilde Festival in 2010

Voodoo People

Pendulum's Gareth McGrillen on how The Prodigy managed to meld two different worlds

How important were The Prodigy in bridging the gap between dance and rock?
"They invented the crossover! They showed us metal and punk kids who liked electronic music, usually in secret, that there was a way to combine both. Some aspects of the dance scene are worlds apart, but there are areas that are so close in energy that it bred the crossovers with bands like the Prodigy."

How big an influence were they in convincing Pendulum to go and attract a rock audience?
"We grew up listening to metal, so it's hard to imagine one could have existed without the other. But The Prodigy showed us both worlds could coexist. They were our main inspiration."

Do you think they earned the right to share a status with legendary Download headliners like Metallica and Iron Maiden?
"Yes, definitely. Any band who defines a genre deserves equal mention, the fact they can headline those kinds of festivals is testament to the fact."

What were they like as individuals?
"We've gigged with them many times, and we love them all. Keith was the nicest, most humble guy who'd walk off stage right past you, stop, come back and drop some words of wisdom or a strange riddle that made you think or laugh. You don't forget those moments when you're young and supporting and watching your idols from side-stage."

What will be their lasting legacy?
"Changing the landscape of heavy music, and breeding a generation of electronic artists that still try to challenge the conventions of what is, at times, a fairly purist world of music. There isn't enough time or words to explain how much they define heavy electronic music, and hopefully will continue to. Rest in piece, Keith."

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MISSION

Only in metal could a band labelled ‘death-infused psychedelic post-doom sludge’ be accused of playing it safe. Inter Arma have a point to prove – and they’re doing it loudly

WORDS: CONNIE GORDON

PRESS/JOEY WHARTON

Within the context of a band, the creative process can take many forms. Sometimes, a group of musicians get in a practice space and what emerges is the result of round-the-room collaboration with everyone adding their two cents. Other times, an established core does the lion's share of the song writing work, utilising valuable contributions from other members when appropriate and necessary. To this point, think of how the most popular song by metal's most popular band – Metallica's *Enter Sandman*, in case you're wondering – was mostly written by Kirk Hammett instead of James Hetfield and Lars Ulrich, that band's recognised creative heart. Technology has imbued us with numerous cases of one-(wo)man projects in which a single individual writes, plays and records everything. Countless creative permutations exist, and it's not uncommon for several procedural avenues to be explored and methodological hats to be donned during the songwriting process.

Enter Inter Arma. Since forming in 2006, the Richmond, Virginia quintet have delivered adventurous sludge-infused metal that weaves in elements of old-school death metal, psychedelia, downcast doom, stoner/Southern rock and pensive shoegazing post-metal. Since their debut album, 2010's *Sundown*, introduced the band's trademark, lurching riff style, one that catapults gargantuan downtuned chords, buzzing bends and twangy pull-offs directly into the heart of dissonant dyads, minor thirds and belly-of-the-beast vocals, Inter Arma have done everything in their power to expand outward, never failing to reinvent themselves on every release. Clichéd as it is to say, the heavier parts have gotten heavier, the pretty parts have gotten prettier and the psychedelic parts have gone further into space. They've never curtailed any amount of daring and threw all convention out the window on 2014's *The Cavern*, a 40-minute single-song EP that answered the rarely asked question: what would a five-car pile-up consisting of Lynyrd Skynyrd, Neurosis, Cult Of Luna, Steely Dan and The Body sound like?

Aside from their recognisable sound, what's also unique about Inter Arma is that the majority of their material is written by one member, T.J. Childers. This wouldn't be such a big deal if it weren't for the fact that T.J. is the band's drummer.

"Our writing process is different than a lot of bands' in that most of our stuff is written by T.J.," acknowledges vocalist Mike Paparo. "Everyone contributes and writes songs, but he's a hell of a guitar player and a lot of stuff comes from his mind. We hash it out in the practice space where there's a lot of playing things over and over and over again until we get a feel for the arrangements, but it all starts from him."

So, when T.J. came to his bandmates – Mike, guitarists Steven Russell and Trey Dalton, and recently added bassist Andrew Lacour (ex-KEN Mode) – wanting to make the band's latest and fourth full-length, *Sulphur English*, nastier than its predecessors, everyone quickly fell into line. Not that it took much convincing for a heavy band to up the ante on its heaviness.

"He literally wrote the entire record," Mike laughs, "and that wasn't planned. He just did it. It's not like he has an iron fist, it just happened that way. Steven and Trey added their own solos, flourishes and things like that and helped arrange, but for the most part the riffs are all T.J. He decided the tone. He wanted everything to be uglier, harsher and more fucked up and when things got psychedelic, he wanted things *way more* psychedelic. In his head from the start he wanted to write the opposite of [2016 album] *Paradise Gallows*, which he thought was too pretty. For me, I love abrasive stuff, that's where I come from, so I was right on board. Everyone else was, too, but he was definitely the captain of the ship in wanting a darker sound."

"OUR FANBASE IS WEIRD. I ENJOY THAT"

MIKE PAPARO

Mike describes *Sulphur English* as Inter Arma's "middle finger moment." It's the band thrusting the ol' "Bronx salute" at a variety of targets, including those who have pigeonholed them as a dime-a-dozen stoner/sludge band and a segment of friends and locals ("I'm not going to name names here," he laughs) who chided the band for the more expansive tack taken on *Paradise Gallows*, assuming they were going to make a thrust towards the mainstream.

"I obviously don't have a problem with any of the stuff we get lumped alongside or compared to or other genres of music, but we're a much more multi-dimensional band. We toured with Carcass and Deafheaven in North America and got a good reaction, but went over a lot of people's heads. The same thing happened when we toured with Deafheaven in Europe. I'm not even sure how many metalheads are in Deafheaven's fanbase anymore, so that we got some good reaction from a group of people no one is sure about should indicate that we're more than just one thing. I do feel that our fanbase is weird and I definitely enjoy that."

Sulphur English also sees Mike flipping the bird at his previous motivations. His past lyrics often spiralled around elaborate tales that, depending on interpretation, time of day and/or mood, may or may not have had application to present day or

Inter Arma (left to right): Steven Russell, Mike Paparo, TJ Childers, Trey Dalton

PRESS/JOEY WHARTON

reality. Variably, he would reference historical events or fleeting incidents from his personal life, other times it was about surrealistic stream of consciousness or pure fiction.

"The themes that ran through the lyrics on *Paradise Gallows* were really subtle. A couple of the songs tied into the theme of the season of summer. There's a reference to the constellation Sagittarius, which is one you can see in the summer sky. The title track was about somebody who commits a heinous crime, escapes and ends up in what might be considered a paradise. They run away from what they've done and are arrogantly waiting for someone to find them and their time to come."

On the new album, however, Mike tapped deeper into his own experience and surrounding reality, spilling his guts, inner demons and observations like never before. He has battled depression, and it was the throes of a dark time that begat the tracks *The Atavist's Meridian* and *Citadel*, the latter being a testament to "being able to beat it, or at least get through that shit."

And like many, he's sick and tired of politics, particularly the lies-per-minute spewing out of the yap of his country's president and the unabashed rise of far-right parties and politics around the world. He feels the need to get things off his chest; like a true American, he's seeing something and saying something.

"I've always swung to the left, ever since I started developing a political belief system. The one thing that I noticed when we first started going to Europe in 2014 was that people were inclined to poke fun at America, the political system and conservatives, which I get because they're hilarious targets. But when we went back in 2017, at the height of Trump, there were also all kinds of stuff happening in Europe with the far-right creeping in in Spain, Poland, Germany and the Netherlands, those same people just shut up about it. Travelling around is great fun, but what I've seen has definitely shaped my worldview. I've tried to stay away from politics as much as possible in the past because it's never been something I've been interested in writing about, but I've become angry by a lot of things that are going on in this country and abroad. When it seemed like the album was going in that direction, I still didn't want to do it, but we talked about it and T.J. was just, 'Fuck it. Just do it.' There's a *lot* of anger at a *lot* of things on this record."

***SULPHUR ENGLISH* IS OUT NOW VIA RELAPSE**

the origin of Death

More than three decades since their last album, Possessed, death metal's OGs, are ready to show the world of extreme music how it's done again. What took so long?

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

PRESS/HANNAH VERBEUREN

“We were on a mission to be the heaviest band on the planet. And that’s what we were.”

Jeff Becerra invented death metal. Simple as that. And remarkably, he invented it in 1979, writing what would become the first Possessed song – *Burning In Hell* – at the age of 11. After passing through a few bands as an excitable adolescent, Jeff joined three school friends to form Possessed in 1983. Full of youthful bravado, Jeff and his comrades were united in a desire to push metal into more extreme territory than ever before: faster, heavier, nastier and more intense than even the nascent thrash movement could muster. If Slayer were scaring lots of people in LA, Possessed were hell-bent on being the Bay Area band that could scare Slayer.

“We wanted to do something that was heavier, more crazy and extreme than anything we’d heard. There was speed metal and thrash metal and black metal, so let’s call Possessed a *death* metal band! I wrote the song *Death Metal* to make a statement, that we were the first to do it. We wanted to be different.”

As British grindcore mob Lock Up once stated on a t-shirt: ‘*Seven Churches* on vinyl or fuck off!’ Released in October 1985, Possessed’s debut album was one hell of an opening statement. Adorned with the Satanic imagery that Venom had brought to metal only a few years earlier, and sounding like a sustained screech of infernal rage from the bowels of Hades, *Seven Churches* was instantly hailed as a classic by fans of the burgeoning metal underground.

Thirty years later, it’s impossible to deny its colossal impact and influence. As Jeff cheerfully notes, the late, great Chuck Schuldiner often cited Possessed as inspiration for his own pioneering musical efforts with Death, and while other bands had a similar impact on the genre’s later evolution, death metal’s entire vocabulary can ultimately be traced back to a bunch of songs written by these San Francisco teens in the early 80s. *Seven Churches* is where death metal began. And even though Possessed released two more well-received records before their untimely split in 1987 – *Beyond The Gates* (1986) and *The Eyes Of Horror* EP (1987) – it is for *Seven Churches* that Jeff and co are most celebrated.

“A lot of people feel that way, but the truth is that the second record outsold *Seven Churches* and it’s the highest-selling Possessed record,” Jeff chuckles. “I like the second one more! But with the first album we were just going buck wild and trying to make a statement. You can’t fake that kind of intensity and debut records are unique in that way, aren’t they? But I tried to make every album different, so that death metal could become this all-encompassing thing. I’m proud of all of it.”

A youthful Possessed. Bless ’em

The end of Possessed’s first chapter in 1987 came as a shock to their growing army of fans. As Jeff explains, his bandmates – guitarists Mike Torrao and Larry LaLonde (who’d soon join Primus) and drummer Mike Sus – began to struggle with the rigours of being in an increasingly popular band, and despite the frontman’s efforts to keep things on track, a parting of ways was unavoidable.

“Doing this can be a tough life,” Jeff shrugs. “There isn’t any money in it and a lot of people need that security in their lives. So I understood and I still understand that it’s not for everyone. I still think that if we’d stayed together, it could have worked and we could’ve done a lot of great things. But I couldn’t make them stay. It was heartbreaking. But I didn’t want to be in a band with anyone that didn’t want to be there. Fate had other ideas anyway, right?”

Aside from his largely undisputed status as the creator of death metal, the fact most people know about Jeff Becerra is that he’s been in a wheelchair for 30 years. As he points out, he’s been in a wheelchair for longer than he was ever *not* in one and is happy to regale us with the full, horrifying story of how he sustained his injuries. The short version is that in 1989 he was mugged outside a store and shot from close range. A bullet lodged in his spine and paralysed him from the chest down, taking out a lung and several ribs in the process. Still fearing for his life as his assailants fled the scene, he managed to pull himself across the pavement and roll under a parked car, where he waited for several hours before the police and emergency services arrived. Not surprisingly, from that moment on Jeff’s life was turned upside down and playing death metal was no longer the priority it once was. Survival was all that mattered, both physical and emotional.

“I moved into a new apartment while I was getting used to everything,” he recalls. “It was like being in jail for five

“I CAME CLOSE TO DYING. A FRIEND TOLD ME TO GROW THE FUCK UP”

JEFF BECERRA

Jeff playing at Ruthie’s Inn, Berkeley, California in the early 80s

years. It was lonely. I was surrounded by prostitutes, bikers and drug dealers. It wasn't the ideal environment for anyone, but especially for someone in my position. I spent five years just doing drugs and getting fucked up on alcohol. I came pretty close to dying, to be honest. But in the end, after I sobered up a little, a friend of mine, who was *also* in recovery, convinced me that I should go back to college. He basically told me to grow the fuck up."

If you ever feel the need to turn your life around, let Jeff lead by example. First he quit drink and drugs and then recommitted to education, acing a course at junior college then studying Labor Studies (a mixture of labour law, economics and civil/workers' rights) at San Francisco State University, passing everything with flying colours. Newly qualified, he subsequently spent a decade working in a hospital and being heavily involved in labour union. Along the way, Jeff fell in love, got married and had two children. But in the back of his mind, the urge to resurrect Possessed and to pick up where the band left off remained and eventually proved irresistible.

"I definitely always wanted to get the band back together, but there were some things I really needed to take care of first. I needed to straighten my life out in many ways, and that's what I did. Now I have a family and a house and, finally, a new Possessed record. It just took a long time to get there, but things are good right now. I wanted everything to be exactly right, so I guess it was always going to take a long time. The last 12 years have basically been a search, to find the perfect Possessed line-up."

A pre-Possessed Jeff fronting Blizzard in Alvarado Park, California in 1981

"THE SONG *DEATH METAL* WAS A STATEMENT, THAT WE WERE THE FIRST TO DO IT"
JEFF BECERRA

Possessed officially returned just over a decade ago, a comeback sparked when Jeff was invited to perform guest vocal duties with LA death metal crew Sadistic Intent on a cover of *Seven Churches*' classic opener, *The Exorcist*. Suitably impressed with the way the band performed his own classic material, Jeff decided to bring his band back to life with his new associates' assistance. Twelve years and several line-up changes later, only drummer Emilio Marquez remains from that initial Sadistic Intent crossover, but Jeff's ultimate goal has clearly been achieved: 33 years since Possessed last released a full-length studio album, they are about to unveil an absolute skull-cracking monster in the form of *Revelations Of Oblivion*.

The first in a three-album deal with new label Nuclear Blast, it's a ferocious reclaiming of the death metal throne, full of newly minted hellish anthems and that unmistakable Possessed atmosphere, with Jeff's feral bark front and centre, just as Satan intended. If you saw the current line-up at Bloodstock in 2017, you will know precisely how monstrous and destructive the band have once again become. As you might imagine for a man who has suffered more than his fair share of misfortune, Jeff is absolutely thrilled to be back and is newly determined to give metal a massive, jolting dose of death metal in its purest form.

"There are a million bands out there playing death metal, but this is what *I* consider to be death metal," he concludes. "Some of the bands out there are so insanely brutal and fast, it's almost a different style of music! Ha ha! But I know we've made a great fuckin' Possessed record. I'm really interested to hear what everybody thinks about it, you know? Whatever happens, we're still Possessed. This is still death metal. And life is good." H

***REVELATIONS OF OBLIVION* IS OUT MAY 10 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEFF BECERRA/PRESS

"It was like stepping into a new world"

At The Gates' Tomas Lindberg on how Possessed sparked a metal revolution

When did you first hear Possessed?
"I must have been 14, or even 13 years old. I bought the *Seven Churches* vinyl after saving up my weekly allowance, and it was like stepping into a new world. I had already heard Sodom, Hellhammer, Mercyful Fate, Bathory and Slayer. But this was somehow *so* convincing, and at the same time so over the top. I loved it straight away."

How did they influence you?
"They influenced me a lot. Possessed were one of the main cornerstones of my first band, Grotesque. And Jeff's vocals have always been, and still are, a big influence. He taught me that you could sound super-evil *and* still pronounce the lyrics.

What has Possessed's impact been on metal as a whole?
"I think more than people realise. I believe that death metal wouldn't have been the same without them. Their influence on bands like Morbid Angel, Immolation etc can't be overlooked. They are heroes in my book."

What do you think of the band's new material? How much have you heard?
"I've only heard one song so far, but I loved it. The vibe is definitely there, and the vocals, too. I'm looking forward to listening to the full album a lot!"

EMPLOYED TO SERVE

IRON WILL

Singer of Employed To Serve. Beating heart of Holy Roar records. Justine Jones has become one of modern metal's most vital figureheads. And she's had to work her heart out to get here

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

At the moment, UK metal is killing it. While established giants like Architects and While She Sleeps have been stepping up to the next level, young guns like Ithaca and Holding Absence have just released debut albums that have dropped our jaws. Then there are bands like death metallers Venom Prison and metallic hardcore mob Employed To Serve, who have recently returned with their most exciting and vital music to date.

As vocalist in Employed To Serve, and label manager at Holy Roar, the label representing some of metal's brightest hopes, Justine Jones lives and breathes heavy music – and she's become one of the UK's most important young figures.

When we catch up with the Woking frontwoman today she's warm and friendly, relishing the opportunity to shoot the breeze about music and her favourite bands. As the eldest child in a family who were casual music listeners at best, it was down to her to forge her own musical education. Aged 13, she was introduced to bands like Trivium, As I Lay Dying and Killswitch Engage through music TV channels and friends in the years above her at school.

Heavy music soon proved to be something of a lifeline – although she did well at school, it was a difficult time for her and she turned to heavy music as an escape, admitting her favourite albums got her through her final years.

"I hated school," she admits. "I had issues with kids not being very nice to me. People would shout stuff in the hallway and pick me apart in class. Because I was a loud person, they kind of almost wanted to hang out with me, it was strange. It was the classic, 'I like you so I'm not going to be nice to you.'

"I USED MY STUDENT LOAN TO BOOK BANDS"

JUSTINE JONES

I bumped into this one girl on a night out in town and she went into a massive dialogue about, 'You were always so cool no matter how mean we were to you.'"

Today, Justine is a monstrous front-woman with a fearlessly brutal stage presence and a scream that will peel enamel from teeth. But behind closed doors, it had long been a different matter, and she admits that bullying knocked her confidence for years.

Justine had always been drawn to the idea of being a vocalist in a band, but it's really only recently that she's started to overcome the deep emotional and mental scars left by her schooldays.

"I've only really felt very comfortable onstage for the past year because of being exposed to playing [larger] crowds," she admits. "Now I'm like, 'This isn't as many people as Download festival, I've got this,' or 'We played live on BBC Radio 1 and nothing's going to be as scary as that.'"

When Justine was 16, she met her now-fiancé Sammy Unwin, ETS's guitarist, who got her into death metal like Obituary and Dying Fetus.

"I had *I Will Be Heard* by Hatebreed as my Nokia ringtone for a very long time," she laughs. In 2013, she and Sammy formed ETS, initially as a two-piece bedroom project. And whereas many musicians cut their teeth in mediocre or rubbish bands before making it, this is Justine's first and only band. Talk about getting it right first time.

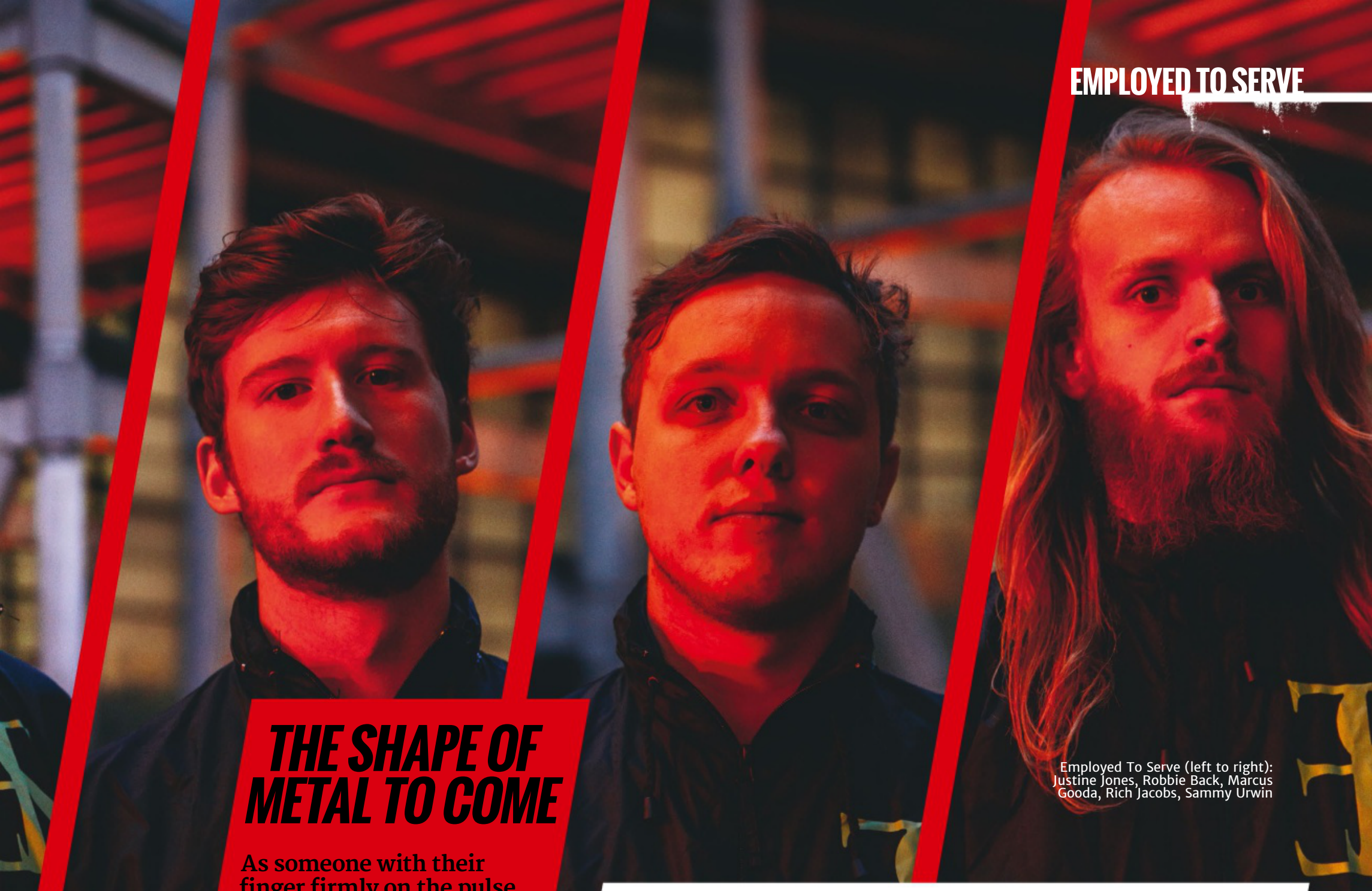
"No one would book us 'cos they didn't know us," she says. "In the end I just booked my favourite bands and put us on opening. I used my student loan for that. I used to lose money, gain money, it was a rollercoaster."

By this point, Justine was working at a retail store in Woking selling mobile products – an experience she describes as "soul-destroying – I actually started liking humanity again when I left retail." It wasn't a complete waste of time, though. One of her colleagues was Josh Redrup, bassist with hardcore firebrands Palm Reader, and the duo would spend their time trading musical recommendations while Justine would use quiet moments to email promoters and book ETS gigs on the sly. Lyrically, too, working a job she hated has shaped the identity of the band. Both their 2017 album, *The Warmth Of A Dying Sun*, and the banging new *Eternal Forward Motion* deal with mental health, social issues and millennial discontent, including the struggle for young people to find jobs in today's difficult climate.

"I need to write about things that mean something to me," she says when asked why ETS are drawn to writing about real life rather than the fantasy-based material we see from many metal bands. "People can't afford houses like the previous generation could. Lots of my friends struggle making rent even though they work full time."

During their time as co-workers, Josh had turned Justine onto Converge and Touché Amoré, two bands involved with Holy Roar, and getting ETS signed to the label soon became her number one ambition.

PRESS/ANDY FORD



Employed To Serve (left to right): Justine Jones, Robbie Back, Marcus Gooda, Rich Jacobs, Sammy Urwin

THE SHAPE OF METAL TO COME

As someone with their finger firmly on the pulse, we asked Justine what new bands we should all be listening to

JUDICIARY

"They are really visceral, the kind of hardcore I really like. They're doing something different. It's not predictable. There's a lot of great hardcore bands at the moment but sometimes you can tell when they're going into a half-time riff; these guys throw curveballs."

ELIZABETH COLOUR WHEEL

"They're an interesting band, not my usual listening but I like [San Francisco label] The Flenser's output. The singer's got some really interesting vocals, like Fiona Apple, Regina Spector kind of vocals. The songs are very catchy and memorable. It's not like anything else that's out at the moment."

HAVE A NICE LIFE

"This is one of my favourite bands. They have a cult album called *Deathconsciousness*, which is my favourite, and they have a new one coming out soon. I would class them as lo-fi post-punk and I can't wait to see them at Roadburn."

LLNN

"LLNN are dissonant hardcore sludge from Denmark. I really love how they sound like they could be sampled on an *Alien* film!"

THROES

"Holy Roar are releasing Throes' new album this summer and I can't stop listening to the masters on my phone. They sound like Portrayal Of Guilt and Cult Leader with hints of Deftones in places."

"I knew they were the UK Deathwish [the label founded by owner Tre McCarthy and Converge's Jacob Bannon]," she says. "I used to buy all their vinyl, pre-orders by Black Mass, Throats and Bastions."

Justine and Sammy had already put out two incendiary EPs under the ETS moniker and, after a gig opening for Pariso, the band of Holy Roar founder Alex Fitzpatrick, she passed him one of their CDs. Not long after that, ETS signed to the label, expanded to a five-piece and released their 2015 debut, *Greyer Than You Remember*. About a month later, Alex offered Justine a part-time internship. "[He] was like, 'Oh you're organised, do you want to try it out?' And I never left!"

Five years later, Justine is a full-time label manager at Holy Roar where her daily tasks range from PR to ordering vinyl to developing album artwork, while her proudest moment has been watching labelmates Rolo Tomassi sell out London's Garage off the back of their latest album, *Time Will Die And Love Will Bury It*. "My favourite thing is seeing our bands at release shows because you see your hard work materialise," she says happily. "Or when we have to package pre-orders and you line them out and see how many they've done."

For ETS's new album, recorded with producer Lewis Johns, they inked a deal with major label Spinefarm records. As the home of Bullet For My Valentine, Rammstein and Ghost, the imprint has the kind of global reach the band are looking to tap into with their new, humongous and groovier sound that nods to Gojira and Deftones.

After slogging it out for years, even spending one year working seven days a week juggling her retail job, Holy Roar internship and Employed To Serve, Justine has succeeded in doing something many people aspire to – she's cracked the notoriously difficult music industry. It's also given her the chance to meet many of her heroes, including Trivium's Matt Heafy, who is similarly passionate about the health of the metal scene and frequently champions new bands on social media. The two struck up a friendship and Justine regularly sends him new music she thinks he'd be into – the last being Danish blackgazers MØL and sludge crushers LLNN.

"Music is definitely my biggest, all-consuming passion," she says, affirming that it was worth every drop of sweat and tears to have her whole life revolve around the thing she loves most. "There were times we stayed in unsafe squats and sometimes not many people would show up to gigs and I'd lose money on a show or tour. But I feel like everything you love and want to do takes work, effort and sacrifice."

***ETERNAL FORWARD MOTION* IS OUT MAY 10 VIA SPINEFARM**

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: JAMES SHARROCK

Can’t believe they’ve gone pop punk (not really)

AMON AMARTH

Berserker

METAL BLADE/MUSIC FOR NATIONS

Swedish marauders chalk up another victorious rampage

WHILE MANY LAMENTING rock and metal’s lack of a spotlight continue to wish for an *Appetite For Destruction* or *Hybrid Theory* bolt from the blue, bands who have been consistently grinding out excellent albums and owning the live environment for years are reaping the rewards and proving that our genre is in very rude health if you can be bothered to look. Few make a finer examples of this than Amon Amarth, now headlining festivals and bothering charts in places further afield than their beloved Vikings were able to conquer, despite never deviating from their gallant yet gruff take on melodic death metal. It’s a testament to the steady ascent the Swedish quintet have been on since nearly packing the whole thing in after 2002’s *Versus The World*, never putting a foot wrong and barely tinkering with the formula that has won them devoted legions of Thor-amulet-clad disciples.

BERZERKER PROVES OUR GENRE IS IN VERY RUDE HEALTH

While last album, *Jomsviking*, presented a mighty concept and added a dose of more traditional elements, this 11th effort instead sees a collection of short stories hoisted between twin pillars of the grand soundscapes that have become their hallmark and the adoration of classic metal emblems.

Planting their standard in the soil with Olavi Mikkonen and Johan Söderberg’s galloping twin guitars on *Fafner’s Gold*, you know exactly what you’re getting, especially once Johan Hegg unleashes his first mighty growl to welcome you on another epic voyage of escapism. While others have Neil Gaiman and the Marvel Cinematic Universe to make Norse history and mythology palatable, metalheads have Hegg to guide them through the sagas and proud tales of yesteryear. Not only are the lyrics able to conjure images of battlefields, longships thrusting into stormy seas and gods pitted against one

another in the heavens, Hegg has a knack of turning them into perfect singalong titles, with the fist-in-the-air stomp of *Shield Wall* a case in point. Following a brief dalliance with clean vocals that adds to the drama of *Ironside*, the brooding lament of *The Berserker At Stamford Bridge* revels in its bloodsoaked storytelling of the prelude to the Battle Of Hastings, painting it more as a defeat than the decisive victory we get in British history lessons.

Musically there's a familiarity to the rhythmic solidity of *Crack The Sky* while the guitarists revel in Tipton/Downing worship on *Mjölner, Hammer Of Thor* to produce one of the most irresistible and jubilant riffs in the band's catalogue.

While *Berserker* can hardly be described as revolutionary, there's a smattering of new grooves in the band's well-worn foundations, with the post-*Clayman*-era In Flames coming to mind on *Skoll And Hati*, *When Once Again We Can Set Our Sails* and *Raven's Flight*. *Wings Of Eagles*' insatiably catchy tremolo picking takes us back to the courageous epics they've built their empire on, while the piano and strings that open the windswept majesty of *Into The Dark* close proceedings in a suitably stirring fashion.

Much like the titular bearskin-clad warriors, there is no secret to Amon Amarth's infamy, their renown simply coming from being relentlessly better than those around them. By once again sticking again to their strengths, they've notched up another resounding victory.

FOR FANS OF: Unleashed, Insomnium, In Flames

ADAM REES

AMERICAN SIN
American Sin
SUMERIAN

Reinvented rockers polish their power riffs for the radio

Formerly known as Come The Dawn, this Cincinnati four-piece have regrouped and rebranded themselves as "slicked-back, denim'n' leather rockers". It's a polished but anodyne nod to the post-grunge/nu metal squall of the 00s, bursting with seismic power riffs, jackhammer tempos and radio-friendly choruses. Tracks like *Roulette* and *Out On The Run* offer the kind of rousing pit anthems that will play exceedingly well on the summer tour circuit. Nonetheless, American Sin's almost belligerent lack of novelty is likely to prove a thorny reality in their rock'n'roll fantasy.

FOR FANS OF: Five Finger Death Punch, Breaking Benjamin, Stone Sour

JOE DALY

ANTROPOMORPHIA
Merciless Savagery
METAL BLADE

Sulphur-steeped yet masterful take on death metal from Dutch veterans

During their brief and first stint in the 90s, Antropomorphia totally flew under the radar. But despite signing to Metal Blade 10 years ago and now four albums in, they are still relatively ignored. That's your loss because, rooted in the heavy 90s Dutch death metal scene – think *False*-period Gorefest with occult trappings – and driven by Ferry Damen's powerful growls, *Merciless Savagery* has a compelling sense of authority. While black metal elements are less obvious here than before, this tight barrage of riffs create an atmosphere of dread and where something malicious is always lurking in the shadows. Only *Luciferian Tempest*, the hit'n'miss duet featuring Farida Lemouchi (ex-The Devil's Blood) spoils the party.

FOR FANS OF: Gorefest, Soulburn, God Dethroned,

OLIVIER BADIN

ÁRSTÍÐIR LÍFSINS
Saga A Tveim Tungum I: Vápn Ok Viðr
VÁN

Pagan BM horde turn their fire on Norway's historic Christian king

Árstíðir Lífsins's fourth album is rich in folksy Scandinavian atmospherics. *Vápn Ok Viðr* is a bleak, tremolo-driven journey through harsh glacial tempests in the vein of pre-prog Enslaved and Gaahl-era Gorgoroth, infused with ambient passages of delicate acoustic melancholy and sparse classical arrangements. Focusing on the saga of infamous 11th-century Norwegian king Olaf II Haraldsson, the gruff spoken-word and chanting interludes offer some extra stimuli for the history buffs whilst evoking images of frozen Northern wastelands and choppy seas. These expansive, immersive compositions offer a more tasteful and poignant way to celebrate Nordic heritage than the usual drunken Viking horn sloshing that is often associated with folkloric black metal.

FOR FANS OF: Primordial, Gorgoroth, Enslaved

LIAM YATES

Keith didn't get the memo

THE DAMNED THINGS
High Crimes
NUCLEAR BLAST

Metal and punk mavens rev up their wild side

RARE IS THE all-star side-project that concocts something legitimately interesting these days. But that's precisely what happened in 2010, when The Damned Things released their enthralling debut, *Ironiclast*. Boasting members of Anthrax, Fall Out Boy and Every Time I Die, what invested the material with such vitality was that it sounded nothing like any of those bands. Quite the opposite, *Ironiclast* expertly balanced a heavy-handed attack with soaring melodies and broad pop sensibilities – a formula behind some of the biggest hard rock hits of the 70s and 80s.

Nine years later, The Damned Things have returned with a new clutch of tunes and a pair of high-profile lineup changes. Back are Scott Ian (Anthrax), Keith Buckley (Every Time I Die) and Joe Trohman and Andy Hurley (Fall Out Boy). Gone are Rob Caggiano (Volbeat, ex-Anthrax) and Josh Newton (Every Time I Die), with Dan Andriano (Alkaline Trio) assuming Josh's bass duties. With the songwriting core intact and the reliably inventive Jay Ruston (Anthrax, Steel Panther, Stone Sour) producing, their latest outing, *High Crimes*, sees the band reaffirming their original vision – a riotous alliance of metal and punk that boasts a blatant and unapologetic debt to Thin Lizzy.

Opener *Cells* uncorks a chaotic surge of crunchy riffs and dizzying tempos that will cause more than a few spikes in the adrenaline meter. Elsewhere, *Carry A Brick* plays out like a boozy, back alley punch-up, electrified by Keith's ragged, guttersnipe vocals. There's a cunning catchiness to *High Crimes* and thankfully, they don't waste any time gunning for gravitas – they're having way too much fun. That said, not everything works. Latter tracks like *Keep Crawling* and *Let Me Be (Your Girl)* lack the hooky menace of the other tracks but overall, *High Crimes* capably delivers on its promise to channel old-school hard rock in its purest essence – fast, scrappy and loud.

FOR FANS OF: **At The Drive In, Glassjaw, The Bled**

JOE DALY

ASOMVEL
World Shaker
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Harrogate veterans pen another round of trad metal anthems

World Shaker is only Asomvel's third album in 26 years, founding member and guitarist Lenny Robinson having soldiered on throughout countless line-up changes and the tragic death of co-founding bassist and vocalist Jay Jay Winter in 2010. Undeterred, Asomvel continue to forge onward with their greasy speedball of rock'n'roll and New Wave Of British Heavy Metal in the vein of Motörhead and Girlschool, iron-clad with determination and a 'fuck you' attitude undimmed since the band's early days of jamming on their local pig farm. *World Shaker* delivers more fast'n'loose, gritty, no-frills heavy metal, full of bluesy licks, swagger and goodtime rock 'n'roll abandon that will no doubt add to the band's still-growing cult status.

FOR FANS OF: **Motörhead, Venom, Girlschool**

LIAM YATES

BELZEBUBS
Pantheon Of The Nightside Gods
CENTURY MEDIA

Black metal comic spin-off sound proves off colour

This album is so creatively bereft that it feels like a genuine attack on anyone showing interest in it. Inspired by *Belzebubs* – an online comic that parodies and pastiches black metal culture – this debut lacks the wit and farce that made its source material so endearing. In their place are by-the-book riffs clashing with misplaced attempts at commercialisation. While the lead single, *Blackened Call,* is a barrage of harmonic Satanism, *The Crowned Daughters* has acoustic verses weirdly akin to Ghost, but throughout the album searches for an identity with all the grace of a drunkard stumbling home from the pub.

FOR FANS OF: **Dissection, Emperor, Dark Tranquillity**

MATT MILLS

BIG | BRAVE
A Gaze Among Them
SOUTHERN LORD

Canada's experimental minimalists reveal a lush new palette

Since 2012, this Montreal trio have explored wide open portent-loaded spaces. Their fourth full-length is as sparse and explorative as ever, but it's rendered this time in accessible technicolour. Where 2017's *Ardor* was immersed in lo-fi solipsism, *A Gaze Among Them* remains steadfastly bold, from the stripped-back, seductive pulse of *Muted Shifting Of Space* through the sonorous, percussive zen of *Holding Pattern* to the blastbeat on *Valium Of Body Individual*. This newfound confidence suits vocalist/guitarist Robin Wattie, her voice sounding by turns otherworldly, captivatingly emotional, and toweringly defiant, Big | Brave have turned sonic minimalism into a kaleidoscopic experience that becomes increasingly compulsive with each listen.

FOR FANS OF: **Emma Ruth Rundle, Chelsea Wolfe, True Widow**

TOM O'BOYLE

BORDERS
Purify
LONG BRANCH

Lincoln metalcore hopefuls fail to find their own spot on the map

Metalcore had a bit of a creative renaissance at the start of the decade. It feels like it needs one again. Borders' debut album is so lacking in ideas, so entrenched in established formulas and produced in such a cut-and-paste way, that it's hard to know what to say about them as a band. Most of the record is so unremarkable that it passes without incident, and when the UK four-piece do try to add something a little different to their palette, the rapped sections of *War* being the prime culprit, it's a sound that feels like something TRC would have left on the cutting room floor five years ago. Ultimately, *Purify* is an album that tells us nothing about the members of Borders other than what type of bands they've spent the last few years listening to.

FOR FANS OF: Hacktivist, August Burns Red, Ice Nine Kills

STEPHEN HILL

COCAINE PISS
Passionate And Tragic
HYPERTENSION

Belgium's riotous pit-starters lead a charge into overload

Remember that time Steve Albini won six figures at a World Series of Poker undercard and the shirt he was wearing in his winner's circle photo? He was sporting merch from this band of nutters, and *Passionate And Tragic* is the second time the punk rock-plus legend has twiddled knobs to harness the Belgian's chaotic and quizzical sound. Vocalist Aurélie delivers cartoon-like, helium-embellished, staccato shrieks on subjects ranging from gender politics (*My Cake*) to sugary desserts (*My Cake* as well, strangely) while the bass pumps, drums pound out fractured Morse Code patterns and guitars imitate the sound of aluminium being set on fire. At times, their red-lining din forces riffs and melody to disappear behind a hail of noise, but the energy is infectious and designed for sweaty live caves. Perfect for a band who have played more than 400 gigs in three years.

FOR FANS OF: The Locust, Arab On Radar, Melt-Banana

CONNIE GORDON

DEFEATER
Defeater
EPITAPH

Massachusetts melodic hardcore quartet drive deeper under the skin

It's been four years since Defeaters' last concept album and, despite a series of health issues and the departure of guitarist Jay Mass, this fifth full-length does their collection proud. It is sophisticatedly dark and well crafted, the atmospheric and captivatingly chaotic early single *Mother's Sons* displaying the coarse shouts, strong narrative, and deftly emotive guitarwork that have made this band beloved. *The Worst Of Fates* and *No Man Born Evil* are particularly powerful with raw vocals and furtive melodies, and the ominous build of *Desperate* is effective, too. Their risks with pace do not always pay off and the interminably slow *Hourglass* sees them getting a touch too clever, but, on the whole, *Defeater* delves deeper into the band's psyche than ever and the result is arresting and cathartic.

FOR FANS OF: Touché Amoré, La Dispute, Being As An Ocean

NIK YOUNG

DEIPHAGO
I, The Devil
HELLS HEADBANGERS

Extreme metal's most extreme band? Pretty much

Two seconds into the opening track on Deiphago's fifth album, the only feasible response is to scream "Jesus shitting H fucking Christ, there goes my face!" and surrender to the most pulverising and insane metal blitzkrieg of the year so far. Or, perhaps, of any year. Because while this Philippino crew have long been renowned as one of the most twisted and violent bands in the underground, they have only previously hinted at *I, The Devil*'s frankly terrifying levels of abominable extremity. Superficially, Deiphago's remorseless, claustrophobic approach shares certain DNA with Portal and their swirly, ill-defined ilk, but where those bands hide behind churning, ambient fug, these maniacs are always front and centre, breathing fire, gurning like Abbath and getting right in your ghostly, mortified face. Consumed in one sitting, *I, The Devil* could break you forever. But what a way to go.

FOR FANS OF: Abominator, Hate Eternal, Tetragrammacide

DOM LAWSON

Danko Jones: not fully woke

DANKO JONES
A Rock Supreme
RISE ABOVE

Rock'n'roll fundamentalists keep the power beneath the polish

POLITICS, CLIMATE CHANGE, mental health: subjects you will never hear on a Danko Jones album. Yet the cheeky, chugging trio from Canada, fronted by Danko himself, have always been unapologetically consistent in their sentiment that revolves around rock clichés celebrating the simple pleasures of playing guitar, having fun and, err, shagging.

In 2002 they released the wilful *Born A Lion* – a bold slab of post-garage, desert-style rock hinting that there was a niche for them in the metal community, but successive albums have delivered a more polished version of their ebullient repertoire, lasting up to the here and now with *A Rock Supreme*.

The first words uttered on their ninth album are *'I'm in a band and I love it'*, landing a mission statement for the ensuing course of lascivious rock'n'roll tuneage. *'All I wanna do is jam with my band and hit the road'* we're informed but anyone who has heard Danko's podcast or read his Huffington Post column will know that the real Danko is smart and self-aware.

Superficially, *A Rock Supreme* is a simple yet honed celebration of that life on the road, but second glances unearth earworms cropping up in the staccato chatter of *We're Crazy*, the dancefloor invitation of *Dance Dance Dance* and Danko's Bon Scott vocal parallel on *I Love Love. That Girl* is a song Danko would no doubt sing while salaciously eyeballing a chick in the front row. As we reach the finish line, *A Rock Supreme* shows no signs of winding down. *Burn In Hell* and *You Can't Keep Us Down* are frantic listens, segueing from the lyric-stuffed punk attack of the former to the taught and chanty leg-shaker that closes the album.

In an age of uncertainty and growing restlessness, Danko Jones are the optimistic go-to band who don't bother to make any proclamations other than enjoy yourself, and sometimes that's all you need.

FOR FANS OF: Backyard Babies, AC/DC, Thin Lizzy

HOLLY WRIGHT

Employed To Serve: metallic hardcore high-risers. Get it? We're fucking funny

EMPLOYED TO SERVE

Eternal Forward Motion

SPINEFARM

Woking wrecking crew find their composure in chaos

EMPLOYED TO SERVE announced themselves in 2012 in a maelstrom of mangled technicality and erratic violence. Since then, they've evolved into one of the scene's most reliably savage propositions. It's strange to think that chaos can be a safety rail but until now, the metallic hardcore mob have seemed comfortable in their most untamed moments. They admitted they were nervous when first writing the slower-paced, Gojira-meets-Deftones grooves that littered 2017's *The Warmth Of A Dying Sun*, but after taking that record on the road, they quickly realised how much they loved playing those megalithic moments live.

So, with *Eternal Forward Motion*, the Woking quintet have taken the plunge, building their third album around frequently doomy riffs so humongous they'd have Godzilla shitting his pants. On the title track and *Suspended In Emptiness*, gruesome and oppressive grooves grind and groan underfoot like tectonic plates. The chuggy, Alice In Chains-esque churn of *Harsh Truth* is similarly massive, but then vocalist Justine Jones emits a series of shrieks so feral it's a wonder she has any lungs left afterwards. The quartet are also experimenting with more melody – albeit melody that's caked in filth – and guitarist Sammy Urwin's clean vocals on *Force Fed* and remarkably melodic closer *Bare Bones On A Blue Sky* have added an unexpected dimension we haven't heard from this band before.

If all this is reading like they've watered down their caustic edges then, don't worry, the hallmarks of their choppy mania is still scattered everywhere. *Owed Zero* is deliciously deranged and *Dull Ache Behind My Eyes* and *We Forgot You* are veritable riff cities, stacked with rhythmic changes volatile enough to incite a nosebleed. Sure, *Eternal Forward Motion* pushes the boundaries of what we've come to expect from Employed To Serve, but they've nailed yet another masterclass in destruction with their abrasive spirit intact.

FOR FANS OF: **Code Orange, Will Haven, Gojira**

DANNII LEIVERS

ENFORCER

Zenith

NUCLEAR BLAST

Swedish retro crew jump the soft rock shark

A decade on from their debut album, Enforcer are still consumed by nostalgia. Initially, the Swedes' sound was an irresistible tribute to Iron Maiden circa 1981 that stood out among the retro hordes. The problem with *Zenith* is that Enforcer have decided they're an AOR band, the skull-rattling energy of those early records now replaced by cornball pastiche. Songs like *Die For The Devil* may sincerely proclaim their creators' love of Scorpions, Ozzy and Dokken, but the overwrought hooks and claggy, multi-part harmonies reek of contrivance. If you want to hear this stuff done with rapt conviction, listen to H.E.A.T. instead.

FOR FANS OF: **Scorpions, H.E.A.T., Cauldron**

DOM LAWSON

FRACTAL UNIVERSE

Rhizomes Of Insanity

METAL BLADE

French tech metallers attempt to curb their chaos

Having ticked all the technical boxes on debut *Engram Of Decline* without joining the dots, the pressure is on for Fractal Universe to produce something more discernible. But while it has plenty to admire, *Rhizomes Of Insanity* will still bewilder even the most ardent fan of distorted chaos. Vocalist Vince Wilquin takes on death growls, soothing melodies and Meshuggah's nightmarish synthetic whispers in the space of a few songs, while unsettling moods, jolting polyrhythms and idiosyncratic riffs tie a sonic Gordian Knot. Aptly formed around a concept of insanity, the maelstrom does divulge some tangible ideas. *Flashes Of Potentialities* builds to a rousing chorus, the lead work on A *Reality To Foreclose* is sublime, and *Masterpiece's Parallelism* is joyfully frantic.

FOR FANS OF: **The Faceless, Rivers Of Nihil, Obscura**

ADAM REES

GOLD

Why Aren't You Laughing?

ARTOFFACT

Artful and mercurial misery from the Dutch lowlands

Despite some eminently listenable releases, Gold remain an intriguing enigma. At heart they play surging post-punk with a flair for the gothic, but the more you listen the starker their oddness seems to be. The maudlin, grungy tones recall the low-key brilliance of fellow outliers True Widow and King Woman, while the weary anguish harks back to avant-indie troubadours Come. The frantic, tremolo-picked flourishes, meanwhile, somehow suggest Interpol trying to play black metal. As if this artful clamour weren't quite enough, vocalist Milena Eva tips effortlessly between desperate intensity and folkish sing-song, sharing tales of anguish and disappointment as she tries to wring a few rare drops of colour from an otherwise monochrome world.

FOR FANS OF: **True Widow, Arcwelder, Sleater Kinney**

ALEX DELLER

HANDS OFF GRETEL
I Want The World
PUKE POP

Yorkshire's power punk/grunge four-piece get personal

Some days all you really want is a fist-punching anthem to clear away the cobwebs. Hands Off Gretel deliver just that on their second album, which moves away from their darker debut's twisted tales. *I Want The World* careers head-first into the boisterous world of three-minute melodic punk anthems with a grungy edge, but there's grit behind those power chords and playful harmonies with songs about body image, mental health and loneliness. Lauren Tate delivers her lyrics with a snarl that sits somewhere between Brody Dalle and Courtney Love. Hands Off Gretel proudly wear their influences on The Distillers-esque riot of opener *Kiss Me Girl*, the heart-wrenching *It's My Fault*, which sounds like P!nk covering Radiohead, and *Milk*, which is packed with L7 riffs and melodies borrowed from Nirvana. A brash and addictive 12-track that demands repeated listens.

FOR FANS OF: **Hole, The Distillers, L7**

NATASHA SCHARF

HELHEIM
Rignir
DARK ESSENCE

Viking metal standard bearers set sail for a new phase

For nearly three decades this Bergen four-piece have been the standard-setters for Norwegian Viking metal. Their latest full-length will only strengthen their reputation as innovators as it sees them once again set sail for new sonic pastures. Drawing inspiration from the weather of their hometown and the ljóðaháttr, an Old Norse alliterative verse form, *Rignir* leaves behind the orchestral, brass featuring sounds of 2017's *IandawarijaR* and instead focuses more on clean vocals and morose melodies to complement their prog-peppered black metal attack. Sinister slow-burner *Hagl*, which builds to an incendiary pay-off, and the epic *Kaldr* both impress, but it's *Stormviðri* that steals the show. Super-melodic and seriously catchy, it could signal the start of yet another bold new direction for the band.

FOR FANS OF: **Ulver, Seigmen, Vulture Industries**

EDWIN MCFEE

HELMS ALEE
Noctiluca
SARGENT HOUSE

Aquatic wonders from the deep reaches of the alt-sludge trenches

It seems fitting that Helms Alee have named their fifth album after a type of glowing, sea-dwelling algae: a mysterious but commonplace lifeform that many wouldn't even know exists. The band have, after all, been quietly plugging away for over a decade, making impressive, inventive music that's both understated and underrated. While the sludgy thunk is never too far away, *Noctiluca* represents the band's most restrained work to date, more than ever recalling the airy dream pop of Cocteau Twins or the odd, spidery types who released records with the Dischord, Kill Rock Stars and Simple Machines labels back in the mid-90s. From the poundingly hymnal *Lay Waste, Child* to the sparkling *Spider Jar, Noctiluca* offers a treasure trove of aural wonders to be discovered – you just have to be willing to dive deep down into some dark, uncharted waters to find them.

FOR FANS OF: **Big Business, Smart Went Crazy, Jawbox**

ALEX DELLER

INTER ARMA
Sulphur English
RELAPSE

Awe-inspiring sonic horror from Virginia's riff alchemists

Inter Arma's great skill has always been in deftly weaving together an array of dark threads, and *Sulphur English* is perhaps their finest feat of alchemy to date. Effortlessly slipping between death, doom and black metal, this fourth full-length is as exciting as it is terrifying, drawing on everything from Ulcerate or Morbid Angel and the fractal bleakness of Thantifaxath to the spirit-sapped psychedelia of Yob. Perhaps the most puzzling – and also the most wonderful – thing about the whole dizzying experience is that while you can point out specific sounds or inferences while they're occurring, you can't necessarily figure out how those points were actually *reached*. It often feels like you're waking from one dream into another, and leaves you wondering how such monstrous, hulking heaviness could have been hewn with so fine and subtle a touch.

FOR FANS OF: **Neurosis, Hope Drone, Gorguts**

ALEX DELLER

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

DEATH BLOOMS
You Are Filth
SELF-RELEASED

Marrying hardcore blitz to nu metal bounce is hardly a new formula, but Liverpool's Death Blooms do it very well. First song *Crosses* comes out of the traps like Slipknot's agitated younger cousin. A promising second EP.

REMFRY DEDMAN

HEBOSAGIL
Fortuna/Kevät
EKTRO/FULL CONTACT

These Finns have crawled beyond their noise-rock roots to create something bizarrely transcendental. Gristly low-end collides with shoegazing shimmers, post-hardcore smarts and an emotional depth as moving as it is momentous.

ALEX DELLER

LOTUS EATER
Social Hazard
HOPELESS

This Glaswegian quintet are the stuff of sensible people's nightmares. *Social Hazard* is a tech-heavy, relentlessly brutal collection of styles, riffs, electronics and pure screaming that shouldn't work. But it does.

STEPHEN HILL

SWORN AMONGST
Reclamation
FAMINED

Relatively bog-standard UK metalcore from sunny Kingston-Upon-Hull. Hints of interesting ideas come forth on *Believe*, but after four albums, five EPs, and 17 years, you'd expect Sworn Amongst to have more going for them than this.

REMFRY DEDMAN

THESE BEASTS
These Beasts
MAGNETIC EYE

Noise rock teeming with distortion and despondency is as appropriate a means of expressing horror at the mess our world has gotten itself into as possible, and this Chicago trio sound as fuzzed out as they are fucked off.

CONNIE GORDON

TREP
Lucian EP
SELF-RELEASED

With their first EP in a two-part series, this Cardiff trio deal in alt-metal bolstered by gleaming harmonies, head-rattlingly catchy choruses and groove-laden riffs. *Lucian* doesn't reinvent the wheel, but it does polish its spokes.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

Full Of Hell are going to make sure you stay down

FULL OF HELL

Weeping Choir

RELAPSE

US grind mavericks reach peak evisceration

AT A TIME when most of us are more than comfortable with accepted levels of brutality and aggression in our metal, Full Of Hell continue to stand out as one of the few genuinely extreme bands out there. It's hardly as if the Maryland/PA quartet need to prove themselves after those soul-wrenching collaborations with Merzbow and The Body, or indeed 2017's utterly eviscerating *Trumpeting Ecstasy*, but *Weeping Choir* simply towers above the majority of likeminded music; this is extreme metal, scabrous noise and swivel-eyed punk rock defiance slammed together with evangelical zeal and summarily propelled to new heights of intensity.

The first three tracks are over in the blink of an eye: bursts of breakneck but consistently eventful grind, delivered at maximum speed and with levels of vitriol that will warm the cockles of your shrivelled heart. *Rainbow Coil* is a three-minute noise assault with shades of the aforementioned Japanoise master; artfully structured and weirdly hypnotic, it's as substantial as any of the album's 'proper' songs. Bookended by machine-gun drums, *Aria Of Jeweled Tears* is another aneurysm-inducing grind attack, before *Downward* opens the gates of Hell with some furiously ugly death metal. Meanwhile, *Armory Of Obsidian Glass* proves that Full Of Hell have mastered excoriating sludge, too. These seven, gruelling minutes provide *Weeping Choir*'s most densely psychedelic moment, the band's slow-motion violence proving every bit as effective as their floored-accelerator ferocity.

The key to Full Of Hell's brilliance lies in their absolute comfort within all manner of sonic realms. More attuned to the methodology of Refused or Dillinger than anyone more traditionally metallic, *Weeping Choir* works as a flat-out sonic bombardment, but its creators' versatility ensures that there are countless layers of intrigue and horror to explore here, too. Your new gods of grind, ladies and gentlemen.

FOR FANS OF: **Nails, Merzbow, Code Orange**

DOM LAWSON

KAMPFAR

Ofidians Manifes

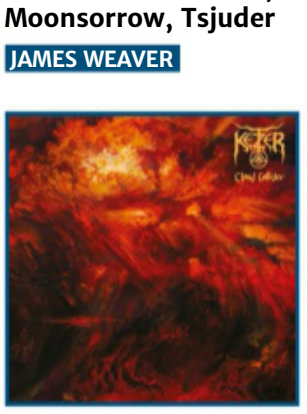
INDIE RECORDINGS

Pagan-minded black metallers cast a wide sonic net

Kampfar have been forging their Pagan-driven brand of Norwegian black metal for 25 years and this eighth effort is as dynamic as it is ferocious. A barrage of blastbeats and demonic shrieks from frontman Dolk breathe the record into life on opener *Syndefall* and Kampfar demonstrate their versatility as the album progresses. The slow, crawling husk of *Dominions* is a real treat, and the guest vocals from Djerv's Agnete Kjølsrud heighten the ethereal atmosphere. *Natt* encapsulates their Pagan bearing as chanting vocals soar above a delightful fusion of hooky riffs and powerful drumming. A strong and dominant display from a premier outfit in Norway's black metal scene.

FOR FANS OF: **Taake, Moonsorrow, Tsjuder**

JAMES WEAVER



KETZER

Cloud Collider

METAL BLADE

Teutonic marauders vault the black/thrash boundary walls

Ketzer's sound has come a long way since 2009's debut, *Satan's Boundaries Unchained*, although that album's speed and bite still lies at *Cloud Collider*'s blackened heart. The blistering *No Stories Left* – featuring a strong cameo from Absu's Proscriptor McGovern – proves the band haven't forgotten their roots, while the title track is relentless in its razor-sharp riffing. But now there's an underlying sense of melody and experimentation that pushes their fourth album beyond the constraints of blackened thrash. *Walls*' sweeping riffs sounds akin to modern-era Tribulation and *Light Dies Last* is a sprawling yet epic final bout as twin guitar harmonies reign supreme.

FOR FANS OF: **Tribulation, Desaster, Deströyer 666**

JAMES WEAVER

LICE

Woe Betide You

SEASON OF MIST

Shining and Teitanblood members drift off the black metal tracks

Featuring Shining's Niklas Kvarforth and drummer 'J' of Spanish occult metallers Teitanblood, Lice will inevitably attract attention. Described by their label as 'avant-garde black metal' *Woe Betide You* leans toward post-and depressive BM territories, occasionally departing the metal genre altogether. Though it often makes use of frantic, fast-paced black metal passages, and more drawn-out doomy parts, the red lines that run through the work (aside from the vocals of course) are the loose, jazzy interludes, the fragile melodies and the clean guitarwork, as well as the post-punk and shoegaze inspirations. It's an eclectic and compelling debut. The drawn-out song structures are obviously integral to the project, but some songs would have still have benefited from greater brevity.

FOR FANS OF: **Lifelover, Shining, Ved Buens Ende**

DAYAL PATTERSON

LOST IN KIEV
Pesona
PELAGIC

Gallic post-rock futurists offer a briefer history of time

The third chapter of Lost In Kiev's epic, sprawling instrumental rock comes with a few twists to the formula. A lighter affair, *Persona* still retains the spoken word elements and breadth of vision, but with more emphasis on synths that give the album a neo-futuristic feel. It conjures a pristine atmosphere rather than revelling in in-vogue 80s-style future dystopia. Tracks have been made shorter whilst still retaining the Parisians' widescreen magnitude. *Persona* mostly succeeds; *Lifelooper®* and *XM3126* still fit a remarkable amount in, but a couple of tracks do feel rushed in the pursuit of brevity – a skill that hopefully Lost In Kiev will perfect come album number four.

FOR FANS OF': **Toundra, Exxasens, If These Trees Could Talk**

REMFRY DEDMAN

THE MACHINIST
Confidimus In Morte
PROSTHETIC

New York metcalcore newbies in need of a memorable hook

The debut album from this NY quintet is a fairly sketchy affair. You can tell that they're passionate about making a serious racket, but very little, if anything, really sticks. What you get is an extremely earnest and one-dimensional set of modern metalcore and deathcore-inspired noise that makes your head nod and then evaporates from your mind the second it's all over. Which is a shame, as it is clear that The Machinist are technically proficient musicians, and vocalist Amanda Gjelaj does actually have a very distinctive voice in a scene full of identikit frontmen. But the band really could do with unleashing themselves from the shackles of the scene they currently find themselves in and experimenting with their use of dynamics if they ever want to be more than also-rans.

FOR FANS OF: **Beneath The Massacre, Suicide Silence, The Agonist**

STEPHEN HILL

MÅNEGARM
Fornaldarsagor
NAPALM

Pagan folk stalwarts fail to light up the sky

It's always been a little hard to know what to make of Månegarm. Positioned somewhere between upbeat folksiness and scabrous extremity, the Swedes' sound is full of well-worn and familiar tropes, all delivered with the requisite aggression and pomp, of course, but rarely telling us anything we don't already know. *Fornaldarsagor* has a few genuinely brilliant moments; *Ett Sista Farväl* is wonderfully emotive and evocative with blissful, intertwined melodies and fierce dynamics; *Spjutbädden* is a rampaging, mid-tempo sprawl with powerfully icy undertones; *Dödskvädet* is a stripped-down, pleasingly melancholic thing with shades of *Hugsjá*. The problems come when Manegarm over-estimate the world's enthusiasm for meat'n'potatoes folk metal. Songs like *Hervors Arv* and *Tvenne Drömmar* give off a strong whiff of epic-metal-by-numbers, with perfunctory melodies and pedestrian arrangements that dull the impact of Månegarm's more adventurous instincts.

DOM LAWSON

MARTYRDÖD
Hexhammaren
CENTURY MEDIA

Crust-laden Swedes wring fresh inspiration from their changes

Track the history of these "progressively crusty" Swedes and the importance of guitarist Pontus Redig is evident. His arrival for 2005's *In Extremis* ushered in a sublime layer that was part Iron Maiden-esque melodic meandering, duelling counterpoint and part screaming shred. With Redig's departure last year, that element would inevitably experience alteration. *Hexhammaren* is album number seven and with bassist Tim Rosenqvist now moving to guitar, the difference is immediately noticeable. Martyrdöd's unique basics remain, even if the second guitar is less active, but the melodies are more concise, more linear and delivered like traditional leads as opposed to harmonic wandering. That's not to say the likes of *Ränilar* and the title track are any less potent than the band's past efforts. In actuality, a breath of fresh air has wafted in, allowing for outliers like the complex *Helveteslarm* and the raw *Cashless Society* to also contribute to *Hexhammaren*'s refreshing but still fearsome result.

FOR FANS OF: **Tragedy, Unkind, From Ashes Rise**

CONNIE GORDON

New Years Day are about to smash some preconceptions

NEW YEARS DAY
Unbreakable
CENTURY MEDIA

Ash Costello and co turn up both the spit and the polish

NEW YEARS DAY have found themselves navigating the darkness in the three years following the release of their *Malevolence* album, as the Californians battled to escape the toxicity surrounding them while trying to reignite band unity and the sense of artistic creativity they felt was eluding them. Like In This Moment, the quartet have long been known for their striking aesthetic, their music often taking a back seat and favouring conceptual ideas over songwriting. And whilst *Malevolence* bled red in terms of its emotional angst with a reliance on elaborate lyrical metaphors, *Unbreakable* showcases a collection of 12 modern rock'n'roll cuts that gleam with unashamed pop sheen. It's the sound of a band stripped of those previous sonic crutches – the macabre eccentricities now replaced by atmospheric depth.

There's the dynamic lead-off single, *Skeletons*, which packs sufficient verve to become an instant set-staple, and the sexually charged electro-industrial call-to-arms of *MissUnderstood* is impossible to deny. *'You think you know me/You haven't seen my type of crazy/I fucking dare you to try,'* Ash Costello spits, her performance soaring and melodic one minute and chock-full of throat-tearing rage the next. *Shut Up* twists and turns amongst a plethora of electronica-driven beats and ultra-breathy vocals, while Ash channels her inner Gaga on the anthemic *My Monsters*, its hook-filled chorus and driving riffs placing it firmly in mainstream-bothering territories. The whisper-to-wail crescendo of closer *I Survived* borders on saccharine, but there's no denying its commercial heft. As *Unbreakable* shifts between super-charged anthems and rock-radio polish, everything feels undeniably bigger in the merry misfits' arsenal. *Unbreakable* may be a statement of defiance, but it proves they have the clout to back it up, too .

FOR FANS OF: **In This Moment, Halestorm, Motionless In White**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

Saint Vitus: 'Abandon all hope ye who enter here' sign just out of shot

SAINT VITUS
Saint Vitus
SEASON OF MIST

Los Angeles doom legends welcome an old friend back to the fold

ECCENTRIC GUITAR-STRANGLER DAVE Chandler has somehow helmed these wayward LA pioneers of slow'n'low valve abuse through 40 years of good times and bad times – mostly bad. How else could they have maintained such a drug-fogged atmosphere of bleak bitterness and despair? 2012's *Lillie: F-65* – the first Vitus LP since 1995 – saw doom icon Scott 'Wino' Weinrich return to the mic, but despite his continuing struggles, Wino's hoary bellow has always managed to convey a ton of strength, wisdom and soul that gifted the shambling wreck of Vitus a sort of stoic moral compass.

Seven years on, Wino's gone again, making way for the other great Scott in Vitus history, Scott Reagers, who first joined in 1978, and, having fronted three albums, disappeared without trace for 20 years. While there's no doubting Wino's talents and pulling power, Reagers' macabre, madly expressive howls, growls and gibbers remain the perfect fit for Chandler's string-mangling excesses, those eerie squalls of feedback that function as solos feverishly bringing to mind witches' cats in a slow cooker or vengeful ghosts riding motorbikes. So even though songs like *Wormhole* and *Hour Glass* pack a far smoother hip-swinging groove than anything on the last album, there is a more restless, inaccessible and chaotic vibe this time, with *Bloodshed* and frantic one-and-a-half-minute closer *Useless* essaying the wild, snorting energy of the hardcore punk scene that Vitus grew in parallel with. Add in one mellow interlude, *A Prelude To...*, plus one bizarre found-sound experiment, *City Park*, and hardened sludge fiends are left with just two out-and-out doom dirges to savour: the mystical, thumping opener *Remains* and strung-out creepy-crawl, *Last Breath*. It's a more versatile affair, but with Reagers' Jekyll-and-Hyde proclamations signalling a greater unpredictability and freedom, it confirms Vitus's status as the loosest cannon in doom's glittering arsenal.

FOR FANS OF: Black Sabbath, Down, Electric Wizard

CHRIS CHANTLER

LEE McKINNEY
Infinite Mind
SUMERIAN

Born Of Osiris guitarist embarks on a djenty solo journey

With fifth album *The Simulation* barely warm on the record shelves and its accompaniment planned for later this year, Born of Osiris's Lee McKinney epitomises the phrase 'No rest for the wicked'. Intriguing and inventive, the all-instrumental *Infinite Mind* is an expansive, multi-textured soundtrack. Soaring saxophone-led passages, interspersed with djent-laden riffs, course through opener *A Clock Without A Craftsman* before *The Sun And The Wind* dazzles with its progressive noodling. Eclectic sounds tumble out of leftfield throughout; *A Neverending Explosion* flexes its experimental muscles amidst ambient textures and fret-based gymnastics, while *Truthsayer* flirts with atmospheric bursts of electronica. A compelling solo offering.

FOR FANS OF: Born Of Osiris, Textures, Intervals

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

MONKEY3
Sphere
NAPALM

Cosmic Swiss instrumentalists hit the reefer and the aether

Swiss instrumentalists Monkey3 have been on their space odyssey since 2001, nurturing a blissful strain of fractal-display head music. Their buds are positively blooming on this latest lights-out/headphones on experience that journos love to dig out grandiose metaphors for. This time, the band beat us to it: "The instrumental roots of the band refract in a prismatic soundscape where each musical beam finds its own space," they declare, but stoner-pseud verbosity is forgiven with the earfuls of radiant chemistry and eccentric musical architecture put together across six tracks where epic prog chops, psych-doom riffs, sci-fi ambience and windswept guitar heroism collide with cinematic scope.

FOR FANS OF: Hawkwind, Pink Floyd, Monster Magnet

CHRIS CHANTLER

MORK
Det Svarte Juv
PEACEVILLE

Nordic black metallers emerge from personal devastation

Mork's fourth full-length is the product of the strangest and darkest period of mainman Thomas Eriksen's life. Finding himself in the centre of what he's described as "a tornado of tragedy and misery" that threatened to take over his very existence a few years ago, the multi-instrumentalist/part-time beer brewer has channelled all of that anger, sorrow and pain he felt into new music, creating what is arguably his rawest and most rewarding collection of material yet. Driven by a magnificently meaty drum sound, fans of old-school black metal and black'n'roll have much to sink their teeth into and *På Tvers Av Tidene* – which tips a cap to Slayer's *Seasons In The Abyss* – is particularly monstrous.

FOR FANS OF: Darkthrone, Taake, Tsjuder

EDWIN MCFEE

WORLD SERVICE
Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

AVANDRA
Descender
BLOOD MUSIC

Featuring cameos from members of Haken, Astronoid and (ex-)Dream Theater, this worthwhile slice of Puerto Rican prog metal is full of catchy choruses and lengthy instrumental passages.

MATT MILLS

CELOPHYS
Fried Chordata
ROBUSTFELLOW PRODUCTIONS

Kicking off their EP with a sample from *Deadwood*, these Ukrainians ply a trade in monstrously groove-laden, gravity-ratcheting sludge that matches the fictional town in quagmire-clogged degeneracy.

JONATHAN SELZER

RUFF MAJIK
Tårn
LAY BARE

South Africa is not the obvious setting for dark sorcery, but it makes Ruff Majik's frenetic, necromantic doom an intoxicating offering, with the fuzz dial cranked up to the max.

HOLLY WRIGHT

MYRATH
Shehili
EARMUSIC

Tunisia's progressive metallers up their mainstream appeal

After almost two decades together it's becoming ever more apt that Myrath is the Arabic word for 'legacy'. *Shehili* is the Tunisian progressive metal band's fifth release since they wisely discarded the original name of X-Tazy. Mixed by three different producers including Jens Bogren of Opeth and Katatonia fame, its cross-pollination of Middle Eastern-style instrumentation, Marshall stack power and clean vocals is hypnotic and lush. The likes of *You've Lost Yourself*, *Stardust* and the super-commercial *Dance* – commanding a million YouTube viewings in a little over a month – making the band sound more mainstream than ever before. Some will find it hard to forgive them this fact, but singer Zaher Zorgati is unlikely to lose sleep as Myrath march unstoppably to the next level.

FOR FANS OF: Orphaned Land, Amaseffer, Adagio

DAVE LING

NIBIRU
Salbrox
RITUAL PRODUCTIONS

Enochian-chanting Italians drag you through the looking glass

Salbrox means 'sulphur' in Enochian, a 16th-century, ritualistic language devised by occult philosopher John Dee, who believed he had been taught it by angels. Manically enraptured Nibiru vocalist Ardat uses it exclusively, lending the Italians' fourth arcane offering an unnerving atmosphere of summoning. Salbrox's slow-working poison begins with *EHNB*'s percussive heartbeat, matching your own then rapidly switching the tempo, drawing body and mind down its spiral. *EXARP*'s sulphuric acridity dissolves the soul, caustic, enraged, before *HCOMA*'s tribal drums swirling in a maelstrom pave the way for some truly nasty vocal exhortations. By now accustomed to dissonance, the abrupt sparsity of *ABALPT* and *BITOM* leave you vulnerable for defiant closer *RZIORN*. *Salbrox* is not an undertaking for the weak of will. It drags you into its dark dimension and spits you back out into cold reality, indelibly imprinted onto your subconscious.

FOR FANS OF: Shibalba, Mirrors For Psychic Warfare, CHVE

TOM O'BOYLE

RINGWORM
Death Becomes My Voice
RELAPSE

The kings of metallic hardcore unearth the fountain of youth

Ringworm appear to be aging in reverse. They may be eight albums in to their career, but the Cleveland metallic hardcore pioneers somehow manage to keep making each record more savage, abrasive and energetic than the last. Crisp, contemporary production aside, newbie *Death Becomes...* sounds like it could have dropped the day after their incendiary 1993 debut, *The Promise*, with the quintet's raging, thrash-infused hardcore sounding more ferocious than ever. The album runs the gamut from furious, lightspeed circlepit-inciters like *Carnivores* and *The God Of New Flesh* – which incorporates some skin-flaying blastbeats – to taut, authoritative chuggers like *Acquiesce* and the brash, breakdown-infested *Dead To Me*. Human Furnace's bile-soaked, razorblade-gargling roar is the icing on the confrontational cake, sounding remarkably fresh for a man who has been screaming himself hoarse for almost 30 years.

FOR FANS OF: Integrity, Cro-Mags, Slayer

KEZ WHELAN

SCARLXRD
Infinity
ISLAND

British trap/metal phenomenon tones down the riffs

Pitting pure metal rage against unstoppable trap energy, *Head Gxne* depicts a rise from rags to riches that inspired this quirky genre fusion. *I WANT TX SEE YXU BLEED* is a blow-by-blow guide to spitting venom with truly brutal uncleans while, *DEMXNS AND ANGELS*' emotional plea would put *Sempiternal* to shame. Nu metal misery loves company, particularly the brooding *HXW THEY JUDGE* and the trap egotism of *LIVING LEGEND* that sparks a Korn-worthy sentiment – *'I'm a living legend, you're a walking corpse.'* However, has much less guitar presence than last effort *DXXM*, with only one axe display shining through *I CAN DX WHAT I WANT*. The riff in question packs a golden age Limp Bizkit punch, but it's lost amidst the trap invasion.

FOR FANS OF: Ghostemane, XXXTentacion, Bring Me The Horizon

ALI COOPER

Possessed: probably won't be invited back to *Homes Under The Hammer*

POSSESSED
Revelations Of Oblivion
NUCLEAR BLAST

San Francisco's death metal godfathers return in lacerating style

RECORDING A SONG (and a demo) called *Death Metal* in 1984, the historic importance of Possessed is a no-brainer. Their 1985 debut, *Seven Churches*, has long been revered as the alpha sperm of the entire DM genre, those four pimply San Fran teens intensifying thrash beyond previous boundaries with rabidly occult lyrical focus, twisted horror atmospheres and an unpredictable hyperactivity, the chaotic charm heightened by the ragged inexperience of youth. Only frontman Jeff Becerra – wheelchair-bound since being shot by muggers in 1989 – remains from the 80s Possessed line-up, and his unorthodox, distressed rasp is still hearteningly recognisable 32 years after their last studio release. His new band of seasoned scene veterans maintain a neat balance between wild exuberance and slick precision – as does Peter Tägtgren's uranium-weight production. The twisted guitarwork of Mike Tarrao will always be a crucial aspect of Possessed's sound and legacy, and it is a shame he's not onboard (we can forgive the band's other ex-guitarist, Larry Lalonde, for being too busy with Primus), but some of Mike's style has carried over into the crazier, queasier licks, chops and twin harmonies of new team Daniel Gonzales and Claudeous Creamer.

After a glorious quasi-Hammer Horror soundtrack intro, *No More Room In Hell* throws down an OTT tempo and attitude that remain impressively full-on throughout the album's 55 minutes, peaking with the compulsive deathly thrashing speed attack of advance cut *Abandoned* (although several tunes run a bit too long, and one or two may be wholly surplus). However, when the pace does moderate a notch, as on *Demon*, *Omen* and *Graven*, Possessed reveal more clearly than ever how foundational the Motörhead influence is to their sound. So, Possessed 2019: something old, something new, something borrowed, something to rip your face off.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Morbid Angel, Behemoth

CHRIS CHANTLER

This sauna's a bit intense

SUNN O)))

Life Metal

SOUTHERN LORD

Drone metal overlords plunge ever further into the abyss

IT'S BEEN A decade since Sunn O)))'s magnum opus, *Monoliths & Dimensions*, was released, and it feels like Stephen O'Malley and Greg Anderson have spent much of that time trying to fathom where they could it take next; collaborations with the likes of Ulver, Scott Walker and Nurse With Wound kept the band's creative juices flowing, but 2015's follow-up proper, *Kannon*, felt more like an underwhelming retread of former glories than a fresh new chapter.

Life Metal, however, feels like a true successor. The album is the first of two the band recorded with producer extraordinaire Steve Albini (the second, entitled *Pyroclasts*, is due later this year). Given his credentials for making huge-sounding records, it's a wonder Sunn O))) haven't worked with him before, and sure enough, after a brief introductory slice of wind effects and distant horse cries that could have been hoisted directly from Bathory's *Blood Fire Death*, the first thing that will strike you about *Life Metal* is how absolutely humongous the guitars sound. Even at low volumes, the rich, thick guitar tone has such a profound physical presence to it that it feels like you could reach out and touch it – although you'd probably want to wash your hands afterwards. The second thing that will hit you is the impact of the group's new collaborators, with regulars like Attilla Csihar and Oren Ambarchi nowhere to be found. Composer Anthony Pateras lends an incredibly intricate pipe organ composition to the enveloping *Troubled Air*, whilst Hildur Guðnadóttir (Múm, Pan Sonic) provides some haunting, delicate chants to *Between Sleipnir's Breaths*, contrasting brilliantly with the booming low-end distortion, and cello and haldorophone to epic closer *Novæ*, a beautiful and hypnotic companion to *Monoliths...' Alice*.

Whilst not quite as bold a reinvention as *Monoliths & Dimensions* was, *Life Metal* is still an impressive step forward for the collective, and proof that Sunn O))) are still capable of innovating and surprising us after all these years.

FOR FANS OF: Earth, Arvo Pärt, Bong

KEZ WHELAN

SPOTLIGHTS

Love & Decay

IPECAC

Post-rock wonderment from the wistful Brooklyn Heights

Blending clamorous waves of doom with more ethereal influences like shoegaze and psychedelia, this Brooklyn trio's latest marks their most focused and ambitious work to date. In grand, post-rock tradition, *Love & Decay* is built around the dynamic tensions between soft melodies and towering, fuck-off climaxes. *Mountains Of Decay* sees wrecking-ball drums smash into walls of feedback-drenched riffage before burning off into a stridently spacey outro. Mario Quintero's bewitching riffs rise to Baroness-like heights on *Far From Falling* and album standout, *The Beauty Of Forgetting*. Wild experimentalism abounds throughout and yet, there's familiar territory here to make this an immediate and very enjoyable listen.

FOR FANS OF: Kylesa, King Woman, Smashing Pumpkins

JOE DALY

TRIPSITTER

The Other Side Of Sadness

PROSTHETIC

Austrian post-rockers set out their desolate yet delirious stall

Tripsitter set out a bleak but beautiful stall on their 2015 EP, *Metamorphose*, but their debut full-length is a far more impressive, expansive affair. Fusing together starry-eyed shoegaze and emotional post-rock, *...Sadness* often sounds disturbed, like it's trying to wash away the stain left by an anxiety dream. Amid jostling dynamics on tracks like *The Illusion* and *Bury Me*, the quartet sound like Touché Amoré suffocating in an invisible noose of mental suffering. Yet when *Hollow* and *Always* explode in a storm of colossal, gauzy guitars, there are brief flushes of warmth to be found as the album walks the line between cinematic and claustrophobic. For a debut record, this is quite a statement.

FOR FANS OF: Touché Amoré, Defeater, Svalbard

DANNII LEIVERS

UNDEAD PROPHECIES

Sempiternal Void

LISTENABLE

Shadowy Death disciples get a new lease of life

Initiated four years ago by anonymous, if secretly experienced musicians in tribute to classic death metal – and early Death in particular – the band formerly known as Undead have not only expanded their name but their horizons, too. The ghost of Chuck Schuldiner still looms heavily, but unlike the exercise in style that is Gruesome, Undead Prophecies are starting to think outside of the box. The tempo overall is faster while a darker, occasionally doomy vibe still suggests *Leprosy* after a lengthy sunbathe on the shores of the river Styx. And since this operation is commanded by obvious veterans who know exactly what they're doing, it's damn tempting to just play the game.

FOR FANS OF: Death, Pestilence, Asphyx

OLIVIER BADIN

VARAHA
A Passage For Lost Years
PROSTHETIC

Chicago's post-rock pilgrims forget to give themselves a destination

The basic elements of Varaha's sound are promising enough, with post-rock, black metal and the quiet/loud dynamic that works so well for their obvious influences. However, for this quartet from Chicago, the music they've created does little to capture the imagination in any meaningful way and thus *A Passage...* meanders aimlessly for much of its one-hour-plus running time. Opening track *Severance* begins on soft, clean vocal lines that segue into harsher vocals and the music itself is very pretty for much of the time, yet Varaha never quite punch it home, the record never hitting the heights that are promised. By the time the final track rolls around, much of the record has been forgotten and even the shining moments of *Climax & Exile* are not enough to save it.

FOR FANS OF: Katatonia, Anathema, Alcest

CHERYL CARTER

VILE CREATURE
Preservation Rituals
PROSTHETIC

Queer cult dispatches from the frontline of doomsday

Describing yourselves as an 'angry, queer gloom cult' will doubtless trigger some, but given that metal is supposed to transgressively provoke the ignorant, that's a great thing. The existential frustration fuelling this Canadian outsider duo has birthed some truly pestilent sludge, and *Preservation Rituals* is a double disc re-release of their catalogue to date. Disc one comprises 2016's EPs *A Steady Descent Into Soil* and *A Pessimistic Doomsayer* – proving pensive and pulsating with intensity when they crank up a notch. Disc two contains their debut LP, *Cast Of Static & Smoke*. It's a post-nuclear sci-fi concept album that seethes with discontent, its precipitous rage directed at our current bungling of the big issues and our likely self-imposed, impending doom. With tracks seldom under the 10-minute mark, *Preservation Rituals* proves a ponderously poisonous listen for those who'd prefer to fall on the right side of history.

FOR FANS OF: Yob, Bismuth, Thou

TOM O'BOYLE

THE WELL
Death And Consolation
RIDING EASY

Psychedelic Texans find an hypnotic cure for their ills

Austin cosmonauts The Well return with album number three, a darkly swelling heavy psych dosage delivered in the time-honoured 60s power trio formation. *Death And Consolation*'s gloomy subject matter reflects the band's recent hardships and is represented in the a shift towards moodier auras of post-punk murk in the vein of Joy Division and The Cure. This matured sound, combined with the band's trademark spacey 70s grooves and bluesy rhythms, adds a subtle depth to the often formulaic approach to the stoner/psych genre. The combined vocals of bassist Lisa Alley and guitarist Ian Graham work to great effect instilling a feeling of druggy rites and doomy incantations similar to New York's psych druids Naam, and The Well once again induce the appropriate 'Cosmic Nod' effect of heady hypnosis that devotees of the band's earlier work should be well acquainted with.

FOR FANS OF: Naam, Kadavar, Electric Wizard

LIAM YATES

WORMWITCH
Heaven That Dwells Within
PROSTHETIC

Vancouver's fearsome black/crust unit rage for the ages

Canada's Wormwitch are only two albums in to their career yet their music is so assured that it belies their relative youth. Their melding of black metal aesthetics with crust's d-beat rhythms makes *Heaven That Dwells Within* a punchy record that starts off strong and only gets better. Wormwitch's songs are melodic where it counts – the massive guitars of *Vernal Womb* are sublime – and deliciously combative when needed during *Benighted Blade*. In vocalist Robin Harris the band have a voice that is rife with spite and throughout he rarely pauses for breath, the words coming in furious waves and immersing the music in hostility. *Midnight Sun* pushes forward on churning guitars that lead into the calmer waters of *Dancing In The Ashes* before *Lord Of Chains* destroys all in its path with tightly controlled rage.

FOR FANS OF: The Secret, Black Monolith, Rotting Christ

CHERYL CARTER

The Wildhearts: still living on the edge

THE WILDHEARTS
Renaissance Men
GRAPHITE

Ginger's self-wrecking crew reach the 'masterpiece' arc of their cycle

THE WILDHEARTS ARE the Lord High Chiefs Of Fucking Up – a band with a superhuman capacity to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. They have the talent, the tunes and a hotline to the gods of rock'n'roll, which they've pissed away in a demented soap opera of drug-wazzocked self-sabotage. They have their negative side too, but that's another story.

Renaissance Men is their first album in 10 years, and the first to feature the classic Wildhearts line-up since 1997's unlistenable *Endless Nameless*. It's also the best thing they've made since their genius/batshit crazy debut, *Earth Vs The Wildhearts*, back in 1993. Actually, that's not true. It might be better.

Hyperbole? Nah. Frontman Ginger is up there with the best songwriters these septic isles have ever produced, cramming more busting tunes and heartbreaking melodies into one song that most bands do in an entire career. Proof: opening track, *Renaissance Dislocated*, which bollocks in on a city-chomping riff and Ginger's phlegm-throated Geordie holler, then proceeds to let rip with not one but *four* gold-plated choruses, each one better than the last. Or: *Diagnosis*, which locates the sweet spot between AC/DC and the Ramones only to leave them both in the dust. And there are eight more of these gleaming, profane beauties, all equally brilliant.

There's a death-or-glory mania to it all, which may or may not relate to Ginger's recent mental health struggles (he was sectioned last year). There's a darkness, too; let's hope the line *'I'm just working on a way to say goodbye'* on *The Fine Art Of Deception* is an exercise in catharsis, because the alternative doesn't bear thinking about.

The Wildhearts are a dial-up band in a fibre-optic broadband world, and *Renaissance Men* couldn't be more out-of-step with current trends if it tried. And that's precisely what makes it so brilliant. Enjoy it while it lasts, because this is too good for them not to fuck it up again.

FOR FANS OF: Motörhead, Ramones, Cardiacs

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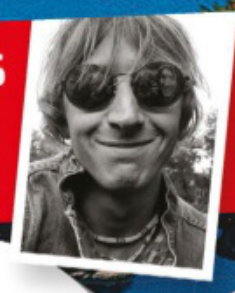

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LIVE EVIL

Your essential guide to the best and the biggest metal bands hitting the UK

ALICE COOPER
THE STRANGLERS
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- **OCT 4** MANCHESTER Arena
- **OCT 5** ABERDEEN Event Complex
- **OCT 7** LEEDS First Direct Arena
- **OCT 8** BRIGHTON Centre
- **OCT 10** LONDON O2 Arena
- **OCT 11** BIRMINGHAM Resorts World Arena
- **OCT 12** CARDIFF Arena

ANNIHILATOR

- **OCT 26** LONDON Underworld

BATTLE BEAST

- **APR 30** LONDON The Dome

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL
PARKWAY DRIVE, SABATON, DIMMU BORGIR, SCORPIONS, ANTHRAX, TESSERACT, CHILDREN OF BODOM, ROTTING CHRIST, SOULFLY, GRAND MAGUS, CODE ORANGE, ELUVEITIE, THY ART IS MURDER, DEE SNIDER, CRADLE OF FILTH, HYPOCRISY, EVIL SCARECROW, SOILWORK & MORE

- **AUG 8–11** DERBYSHIRE Catton Park

CONVERGE
TERROR SECT
CANDY

- **JUL 1** LONDON Electric Ballroom
- **JUL 2** MANCHESTER The Ritz

DESERTFEST
OM, AMENRA, FU MANCHU, ALL THEM WITCHES, KADAVAR, GRAVE MIASMA, WOVENHAND, WITCH, BLACK TUSK, EARTHLESS, STONED JESUS, MONDO GENERATOR & MORE

- **MAY 3–5** LONDON Various venues

DEVIN TOWNSEND

- **APR 24** LONDON Bush Hall
- **APR 25** LONDON Bush Hall
- **APR 26** BRISTOL St George's
- **APR 27** LEEDS City Variety
- **APR 29** EDINBURGH Jam House
- **APR 30** BIRMINGHAM Glee Club

DISTURBED
SKINDRED

- **MAY 11** LONDON Alexandra Palace
- **MAY 13** GLASGOW O2 Academy
- **MAY 14** MANCHESTER O2 Apollo
- **MAY 15** MANCHESTER O2 Apollo

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- **JUN 14–16** DERBYSHIRE Donington Park

FIT FOR AN AUTOPSY
VENOM PRISON
VULVODYNIA

- **MAY 29** BIRMINGHAM Mama Roux
- **MAY 30** BRISTOL Exchange
- **MAY 31** LONDON Underworld
- **JUN 1** LEEDS Key Club
- **JUN 2** MANCHESTER Rebellion

GLORYHAMMER
BEAST IN BLACK

- **OCT 18** LONDON Heaven
- **OCT 19** MANCHESTER Club Academy
- **OCT 20** BRISTOL SWX
- **OCT 22** BIRMINGHAM The Mill
- **OCT 23** NOTTINGHAM Rescue Rooms
- **OCT 24** DUBLIN Academy
- **OCT 25** GLASGOW Slay
- **OCT 26** DUNDEE Church

GOJIRA
ROLO TOMASSI
BLACK PEAKS

- **JUN 29** BIRMINGHAM O2 Academy
- **JUN 30** LONDON O2 Brixton Academy
- **JUL 1** MANCHESTER O2 Apollo

GOST

- **JUN 12** LONDON Underworld

BATTLE BEAST: PRESS

Battlebeast: "total assholes" apparently

ROAD TRIPPIN'

BATTLEBEAST

The bombastic power metallers plan on levelling London this month

What are the other members of Battle Beast like to tour with? Be honest.
Eero Sipilä (bass): "We're best friends, they're total assholes! It's crazy; every day you see the same faces, and every day it's pretty much the same jokes – everybody is pretty much the same. They're your family, they're your friends, they're your colleagues. You're living like canned tuna for six months of a year. It brings out the best in people and it brings out the worst but I wouldn't have it any other way."

You're playing London this month. Does playing shows in the UK feel different to everywhere else in Europe?
"It does, actually! For some reason we haven't played the UK nearly as much as we'd like, but your audience is always great. I remember a show in 2013, we were playing the Camden Underworld and nobody in the crowd knew us, everyone was just looking at us and judging. Then we played a good set and halfway through people were going crazy! I think the crowd in the UK are so accustomed to seeing bands because… well, let's face it, heavy metal was invented in the UK, so they know what's what. You have to win them over, but when you do they're the most loyal people you can have in your crowd."

Which songs from your new album, *No More Hollywood Endings*, are you most excited to play live?
"Probably *Golden Horde*. It's something we've had to practise a lot because it's fast and pretty merciless. It's kind of a thrash metal song but you can't really play it in a punk way because it's got a very precise beat. It's a very easy song to screw up but one of the joys of being a musician is challenging yourself like that."

When writing new music, are you thinking about what it will sound like live?
"We don't really plan stuff that much. We're not thinking, 'Let's make a song with a very anthemic chorus that people can sing along to live', it's just something that comes naturally. It would be pretty calculating to make songs thinking, 'Oh, this is going to sound great on the radio' or 'This is going to be great on a big festival stage'. I don't think it's a very healthy attitude to write music with that state of mind."

Harbinger: going it alone, and loving every second

ROAD TRIPPIN'

HARBINGER

The savagely heavy tech metal crew team up with Rings Of Saturn for some UK dates

How's 2019 shaped up for Harbinger so far?
Kris Aarre (bass): "Absolutely crazy! Last year we decided to leave our record label so we've essentially been building everything from the ground up, so we're now ready to release our debut album, *Compelled To Suffer*, in May. We've also got a few festival appearances and the Sounds Of Carnage tour; it's far beyond what we thought we could ever achieve."

You've got a tour coming up with Rings of Saturn. What can we expect from you guys?
"We're going to make sure we include something from every release that we've done but the whole point of this tour is to showcase what we've got with *Compelled To Suffer*. We'll have a six- or seven-song set, so we'll fit in about four album tracks then the rest will be old songs. This is our opportunity to show people what we are about now."

How nice does it feel to have an album's worth of songs to choose from?
"It's so good. We did two EPs previously, just to get music out there as much as we could, and we didn't want to release an album until we found a label. We thought having a label would give us the best chance of reaching out to new people. But, as it turns out, you don't really need a label these days!"

Do you have any pre-stage rituals?
"So some people might find this a little bit strange. I'm 28, one of the other guys is 27, and we feel like when we are doing hour-long sets we feel we can't go as hard so we have to really warm up. We're talking technical, physical, we're doing all kind of stretches. When we're playing smaller venues that we're used to in the UK it can look a bit strange when I'm doing back rolling exercises, it looks like I'm humping the floor or something! It can look a bit strange when it's a small venue and the public can see what is going on."

What is the craziest thing you've seen at a Harbinger show?
"I once saw a rubbish bin absolutely filled with rubbish get emptied out on top of a dude and then the bin got thrown into the pit and got absolutely demolished! The actual emptying of it onto a person was quite the spectacle!"

Lacuna Coil will bring their spectacle to the UK in November

HARBINGER
RINGS OF SATURN
NEKROGOBLIKON
MAY 9 LONDON Underworld
MAY 10 SOUTHAMPTON Joiners
MAY 11 MANCHESTER Rebellion
MAY 12 LEEDS Key Club
MAY 13 BIRMINGHAM Mama Roux

HEILUNG
NOV 10 LONDON Roundhouse

INCINERATION FESTIVAL
MAYHEM, SEPTICFLESH, SHINING (SWE), ASPHYX, CARPATHIAN FOREST, ABYSMAL TORMENT, WINTERFYLLETH, INCITE, VOICES, NECRONAUTICAL & MORE
MAY 11 LONDON Various venues

KATATONIA
CELLAR DARLING
WHEEL
MAY 25 LONDON Islington Assembly Hall

LACUNA COIL
ELUVEITIE
INFECTED RAIN
NOV 12 MANCHESTER O2 Ritz
NOV 13 GLASGOW Garage
NOV 14 DUBLIN Academy
NOV 15 BRISTOL SWX
NOV 16 LONDON O2 Kentish Town Forum
NOV 17 NOTTINGHAM Rock City

METALLICA
GHOST
BOKASSA
JUN 8 DUBLIN Slane Castle
JUN 18 MANCHESTER Etihad Stadium
JUN 20 LONDON Twickenham Stadium

NEUROSIS
GODFLESH
YOB
JUL 19 BIRMINGHAM Supersonic Festival
JUL 20 LONDON Kentish Town Forum

POSSESSED
JUN 6 LONDON Underworld

QUEENSRŸCHE
AUG 17 DERBYSHIRE Bloodstock Festival
AUG 13 NORWICH Waterfront
AUG 14 LONDON Islington Assembly Hall

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AUG 2-3 GUILDFORD Corner House

RAMMSTEIN
JUL 6 MILTON KEYNES Stadium MK

ROTTING CHRIST
MOONSPELL
OCT 29 LONDON Islington Assembly Hall

VLTIMAS
JUN 21 LONDON Underworld

WHITECHAPEL
JUNE 16 DERBYSHIRE Download festival
JUNE 17 CARDIFF Clwb Ifor Bach
JUNE 18 LONDON O2 Academy Islington

HARBINGER: PRESS. LACUNA COIL: MARIE KORNER

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LIVE REVIEWS

WORLD METAL CONGRESS

RICH MIX, LONDON

Global metal forces unite for a weekend of debate and sonic mayhem

Zombies Ate My Girlfriend reckon it's curtains for civilisation

FRIDAY

Hammer has long championed global artists facing seemingly impossible odds, making the inaugural World Metal Congress – a joint venture between the metal-loving Twin V Productions and the University Of Central Lancashire, supported using public funding by Arts Council England – an exciting proposition. An international gathering of artists, industry representatives and academics, through a mixture of discussion panels, film premieres and live music, the aim is to highlight the struggles of people finding a voice through metal in the face of oppression, war and deprivation.

For 30 years, Barney Greenway and his band, Napalm Death, have loudly advocated humanitarianism, and as he opens the ceremonies he voices his hope that the event be more than self-congratulatory back-slapping. He gets his wish. Friday's discussion panels ask how the scene can support struggling artists from non-Western countries. The first brings together industry heads, including Bloodstock organiser Vicky Hungerford and Roadburn founder Walter Hoeijmakers, acknowledging the problematic nature that borders and politics provide whilst celebrating the internet's ability to give remote artists a platform. The second – moderated by this writer – features the testimonies of artists from India, Nepal and Tunisia. The story of Nepalese band Underside, who've just toured Europe supporting Cancer Bats, is a positive example of how the community can enable artists to realise their dreams.

Hammer irritant Dom Lawson joins anti-fascist activist and journalist Kim Kelly, Labour politician and metalhead Richard Burgen and Radio 1's Daniel P Carter to interrogate how the media treats non-Western bands. Hot-button issues such as tokenism and intolerance are further examined, raising issues of race and gender in metal and sparking controversial audience questions. Similarly, Friday's final panel, featuring Barney, Afghani vocalist Yusef Shah and Holy Moses vocalist Sabina Classen speculates as to what may happen in future with such artists. Shah's blunt, pragmatic observation that if your band doesn't get big, maybe it's because you're shit makes for an entertaining close to a day that interrogates key issues and ruffles a few feathers.

THE SET
WORMROT
Outworn
Blockhead Fuck Off
God's In His Heaven
Take Aim
Dead Wrong
Public Display Of Infection
Buried The Sun
Oblivious Mess
Forced Siege
Descending Into The Unknown
No One Gives A Shit
Shallow Standards
Hollow Roots
Stench Of Ignorance
Back Stabber
Mission Aborted
Evolved Into Nothing
Ferocious Bombardment
Lost Swine
Fake Moral Machine
Sledgehammer
Critical Human Stupidity
Still Irrelevant
Outburst Of Annoyance
The Face Of Disgrace
Outworn
Fallen Into Disuse
Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Grind
The Final Insult
Compulsive Disposition
Good Times Manipulation

SATURDAY

Day two's panels on diversity and activism continue to stoke fires of race, gender and diversity – with ideological clashes on how the scene should be 'policed' sparking particular ire.

Two UK film premieres follow. Director Monzer Darwish's *Syrian Metal Is War* consists of shaky footage filmed in secret and smuggled to Europe via dinghy. It's a sobering experience of young men trying to find catharsis and community through metal in a warzone. It hammers home how lucky we are to be able to express ourselves freely. An emotional Q&A follows with Monzer and Jake Shuker, frontman of Syrian metal band Maysaloon – it's the first time Monzer has seen an audience react to his film. *Songs Of Injustice*, academic Nelson Varas-Diaz's documentary of Latin American metal's battle against dictatorships, terrorism and exploitation, proves equally affecting.

The day closes with an eclectic mix of live performances. Cellist **JO QUAIL**'s black metal-inspired exhortation is captivating, while Birmingham dad/children trio **HAQ 123** embody the spirit of the home of metal whilst bringing a smile to grim faces. Shit gets serious with the grinding, restless rage of Belfast's **UNYIELDING LOVE**, singer Richard Carson's slight frame contorting in manic catharsis amidst bottomless blasts and power electronics. South Africa's **ZOMBIES ATE MY GIRLFRIEND**'s pummelling, nu metal-inflected grooves and voracious if upbeat death metal vocals are rough around the edges but borne on a wave of irresistible enthusiasm. **DAWN RAY'D**s anti-fascist BM's juxtaposition of vocalist Simon B's bellicose scream and rousing violin uplifts but occasionally feels thin. Singapore's **WORMROT** then decimate proceedings. This is grindcore in extremis, delivered in as airtight, disarmingly good-humoured and relentlessly intense fashion as you'd expect from the revered scene veterans, turning the Congress into a seething mass of joyous catharsis. It's a perfect close to a triumphant weekend that's celebrated everything great about the metal scene whilst underlining the areas that we, as a united community, could do better – and surely will. This is only the start of the conversation.

TOM O'BOYLE

Wormrot: grindcore's Far East and far out ambassadors

JAMES SHARROCK

SONATA ARCTICA
WITHERFALL
ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON

Metal bands doing acoustic nights usually feel as comfortable as swallowing red-hot razor blades, but not here. LA's **WITHERFALL** acquit themselves well to this delicate approach. It helps that their melancholic songs fit the style, but the band embrace going acoustic with real commitment, and the climactic *Vintage Medley* is rightly received warmly. **SONATA ARCTICA** don't strictly do the billed acoustic set – it's just a slightly more laidback performance than normal – but they're captivating nonetheless. Inevitably, they concentrate on the balladic side of their oeuvre, in the process accentuating the native folk influences and the strong sense of melody running through *Letter To Dana, Alone In Heaven...* in fact, every bloody song they do. Engaging frontman Tony Kakko ensures the crowd are kept fully involved, but that's never a problem, because within milliseconds of hearing the opening chord to each tune, the diehards are cheering in delighted recognition. The band even have some cheeky fun, referencing Dire Straits' *Walk Of Life* at the start of *Among The Shooting Stars*. Red-hot razor blades have never been more tasty – a highly recommended diet for all fans of class acts.

MALCOLM DOME

SUMAC
BAPTISTS/ENDON
UNDERWORLD, LONDON

It's heartening when so many people turn up for an opening band, especially when Tokyo's **ENDON** are so worthy of the attention. Their mix of Oxbow, Swarrrm and Full Of Hell could come off as witless noise, but they effortlessly combine stop-on-a-dime precision, squalling electronics and the harrowing howls of a vocalist who looks like off-the-rails flotsam from a 90s boy band. **BAPTISTS**' finest recorded moments arise when they open things up and let their songs breathe, but here they lean hard on the muscular metallic crust that's a surefire crowd-pleaser but nothing particularly new after 20 years of bands sounding like His Hero Is Gone. Maybe this over-reliance is a sop to drummer Nick Yacyshyn, since he's on double duty with the night's headliners. **SUMAC**'s expansive set demonstrates just what a force they've become, mixing hypnotic pulses, crushing riffs and freefall guitar heroics that recall a box of fireworks into which a match has been dropped. The trio are so inhumanly together it's a wonder they're not all squeezed into the same pair of jeans, and their deft mix of Neanderthal thunk and arthouse nous is so perfectly balanced you can *almost* forgive them for having nine separate t-shirt designs.

ALEX DELLER

Svalbard: Serena Cherry unleashes Hell

Ithaca: someone misunderstood the 'play loud' instructions

SVALBARD

ITHACA/MORROW

BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON

West Country ragers leave their mark on North London

IT'S AN EVENING of 'Holy Roar-core' down at the Boston Music Room on this Saturday night, with three of the four acts performing this evening labelmates on the hugely respected UK label. Although there is definitely a lot of imagination that permeates throughout **MORROW**'s self-professed emo-crust, it feels frustratingly loose and rough around the edges. The cello and violin parts are certainly an interesting touch in a type of music that usually ignores subtleties, but they're drowned out by the fairly one-note, dual vocal attack of the band. Harness the ideas and there might be something interesting to come in the future.

With a genuinely excellent debut album finally released to the general public, there is a buzz in the room before **ITHACA** take to the stage. It's a great thing to see a large group of people hyped to see a band in their infancy, but, unfortunately for everyone, the sound in the venue does its very best to ruin the excitement by petulantly robbing us of any vocals whatsoever. You can see, and eventually hear, the frustration in vocalist Djamila Azzouz as she politely asks for patience whilst trying to sort the gremlins. When the band do finally kick into gear, their Gallows-meets-Dillinger hybrid sounds fucking monstrous. They'll be back, no doubt about it.

The sound seems to have finally sorted itself out by the time **SVALBARD** arrive, and when it does get sorted out, good god is it sorted out! The Bristolian quartet sound as sharp as a scalpel and as raw and sandpaper in all of the right places. Guitarist and vocalist Serena Cherry is on unbelievable form, cracking her neck back and forth as she peels out venomous blackened hardcore riffs before stepping up to the microphone and unleashing all of her inner torment. The rest of the band around her are scintillatingly tight, and when she expresses herself between songs, such as before a savage *Feminazi*, the distain in her voice is oh so real. With the songs from last year's *It's Hard To Have Hope* album obvious standouts, it feels as if we are very much on the cusp of adding Svalbard to the list of young, world-class metal bands that this country has recently produced.

STEPHEN HILL

MARIE KORNER

Doro raises the roof of the Underworld

DORO

UNDERWORLD, LONDON

German's metal queen rules London town

THERE'S NOBODY HAPPIER at being onstage than **DORO**. She has a true passion for metal, her music and those fans who pack the venue, and when she constantly declares a love for us all, you know it isn't vacuous nonsense.

There's an abiding rapport between the vocalist and everyone in the crowd, not least because almost all the songs in her set are about being a metalhead. From opener *Raise Your Fist In The Air*, these are simple, straightforward anthems that bring people together. The fans sing along, chant her name, pump their fists high, and in every sense are part of the event.

Tonight Doro spans her lengthy career to date. She delves back to her Warlock beginnings, and also takes things right up to date. The performance veers from *Burning The Witches*, the title track of Warlock's '84 debut album, to *All For Metal*, from last year's *Forever Warriors, Forever United*. It all runs seamlessly and with a sense of occasion. Doro treats this club as if she is playing an arena, at one point asking, "Are you ready upstairs?" as if the short riser at the back was a balcony. There's no stage show as such, save for a cowled figure waving a staff as he stalks about during *Night Of The Warlock*. But who needs gimmicks when you have a crowd so involved?

The band are far from faceless, adding daubs of virtuosity and personality to augment the leading lady. And the climactic *All We Are* is inspirational. You can't help but leave with a huge smile after such a gig. However, Doro's smile will be bigger than anyone's. She lives for nights such as this, because nothing matters more to her than metal.

MALCOLM DOME

HOLDING ABSENCE

THE FLAPPER, BIRMINGHAM

With its upgraded-to-sold-out status right before doors, the already-intimate surroundings of The Flapper are packed to the low-hanging rafters by the time **HOLDING ABSENCE** hit the stage. As the Cardiff five-piece take their places beneath smouldering red lights and Lucas Woodland's emotive voice rises against waves of melodic post-hardcore for the thunder of opener *Perish*, the air seems to thicken. Next, a penetrating *Your Love (Has Ruined My Life)* is akin to witnessing a band in the thralls of a cathartic release, whilst *Permanent*'s swelling guitars and tender ambience showcases how these guys have mastered their dynamics with such elevating intent. Joyous sing-alongs accompany a setlist mostly centred around their self-titled debut. Huge pop-centric choruses course through *Like A Shadow* and *Wilt*; the latter switches between anthemic heft and moments of vulnerability as Lucas bares his soul to the rapt throng centimetres away from him – his searing cries building towards the song's closing crescendo. The highlight, however, comes with *Purge*, which entrances the crowd into such revered silence at one point you can only hear cameras click alongside those delicate and ethereal piano keys. Tonight, Holding Absence boast the kind of emotional ambience capable of consuming hearts whole.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

A PALE HORSE NAMED DEATH
TRANSPORT LEAGUE/ALUNAH

ISLINGTON ACADEMY 2, LONDON

Embodying both the allure of a flame-haired glamourpuss and good ol' Midlands grit, **ALUNAH**'s Siân Greenaway is a hypnotic Earth Mother colouring her band's fuzzy, occult-tinged sounds with an otherworldly presence. By contrast, **TRANSPORT LEAGUE** are the archetypal biker doom rockers. Gifted on the six-string, their pedal-to-the-metal set deserves a space bigger than this poky second stage room. After years playing in Type O Negative and Life Of Agony, **A PALE HORSE NAMED DEATH** frontman Sal Abruscato's frequent complaints about the venue are both forgivable and uncomfortable, but once they settle in his effusive gratitude for the fans is a tonic. With former Danzig and Lita Ford musicians also in the band, it's hard not to be enthralled by the cathartic power of their gothic doom flecked with the languid aesthetic of grunge. Cuts from this year's *When The World Becomes Undone* are gratefully received but it's *Killer By Night*, accompanied, also uncomfortably, by "This one is about killing my fucking ex-girlfriend" and the foreboding *When The Crows Descend Upon You* that seal the deal.

HOLLY WRIGHT

Misery Signals: Jesse Zaraska incites a feeding frenzy

DARKEST HOUR/UNEARTH

MISERY SIGNALS/LEFT BEHIND

ULU, LONDON

Washington DC ruffians lead a night of fervent fret abuse

"DEATH TO FALSE Metalcore!" screams the poster behind the merch desk of this evening's festivities. And if this tour was put together to remind people of a time when metalcore was a far less shiny and radio-friendly entity, then openers **LEFT BEHIND** have taken to that purpose with relish. Their sludgy, downtuned hardcore is much more Trap Them than Trapped Under Ice, and they kick things off nicely. It seems that the majority of people inside the ULU are here for **MISERY SIGNALS**. It's been more than a decade since the Wisconsin quintet's last visit to the UK, and there is obviously a hunger for them. From the moment they set foot onstage this feels like a headline performance, with the packed crowd going berserk and clambering over themselves to grab hold of Jesse Zaraska's mic as he repeatedly jumps down into the crowd. They may well be the lightest of the four acts on offer tonight, but Misery Signals still do a line in mean beatdowns alongside those soaring vocal hooks. That a chant of "One more song!" rings out for some time after they have left the stage says it all.

Post-Misery Signals, the crowd do, quite confusingly, thin out for the last two bands, which is a real pity as **UNEARTH** and **DARKEST HOUR** are both on fine form tonight. The former still sound as fresh as a daisy with their metalcore-via-Van Halen-style guitar histrionics, courtesy of Ken Susi and Buz McGrath's dual onstage shredding antics. Frontman Trevor Phipps is also an intimidating presence, stalking the stage, drenched in sweat and banging his head atop his not inconsiderable frame, like a sort of Philip Anselmo/Triple H hybrid. Songs from new album *Extinction(s)* sound excellent too, especially the brooding *Dust*, proving that Unearth still have plenty left in the tank. Ditto for Darkest Hour. The Washington DC five-piece are a scratchier and sharper band than the booming Unearth, but they too still sound brilliantly contemporary thanks to the material from last year's severely underrated *Godless Prophets & The Migrant Flora* album. Relying far more on early melodic death metal than anyone else here, Darkest Hour are arguably the heaviest act on an exceedingly heavy bill. Particularly when they dip back to *The Sadist Nation* from *Hidden Hands Of A Sadist Nation*, which has a pace not far off grind, or their warp-speed cover of Dead Kennedys' *Nazi Punks Fuck Off*. Consider false metalcore well and truly murdered.

STEPHEN HILL

Darkest Hour put in an incendiary performance

Unearth set their sights, metal-style

DORO: TINA KORHONEN/DARKEST HOUR: MARIE KORNER

Pist.On: hello, 90s, my old friend

PIST.ON
SCARLET REBELS/KHAIDIAN/GURT
ISLINGTON ACADEMY 2, LONDON

Nineties metal's forgotten sons stage a righteous return

GURT OPEN THIS intimate show with a certain degree of style, their grinding sludge assault proving to be as hypnotic and groovy as it is caustic. Fellow Londoners **KHAIDIAN** also win friends, though curiously their prog metal compositions take on a Pantera/Fear Factory-esque vibe in the live arena. **SCARLET REBELS** are much more out of place – a point the band acknowledge early in their set – but their classic rock songs have the chops to carry it off, so fair play. But to business: it almost goes without saying but **PIST.ON** have been largely forgotten during their 20-year hiatus (and the Overkill/Destruction show next door hasn't helped attendance figures tonight), which is somewhat tragic, as they were a rare gem amidst the morass of the late-90s metal mainstream. Combining the goth metal of their sometime-collaborators Type O Negative with the grunge rock of Alice In Chains, some Metallica-esque crunch and dreamy pop sensibilities (their Smiths cover continues to speak volumes…), the New Yorkers crafted emotive songs built on irresistible melodies and soulful vocals. Coming out of retirement with very little fanfare, the four-piece return to a scene that never really replaced them (or for that matter, the better-known Type O), but instead moved on to other things. Iconic ex-bassist Val Ium may now be absent, but guitarist, vocalist and sole original member Henry Font is certainly present, along with two other musicians from the early line-ups. Realistically, the band have a huge amount of ground to make up, but tonight suggests that it would be to everyone's benefit if they could manage it, with older anthems like *Grey Flap* and *Rest* complemented by new numbers from a forthcoming album. An unlikely and rather unglamorous comeback, but a genuinely welcome one… fingers crossed.

DAYAL PATTERSON

THE RAVEN AGE
DEFENCES
THE FLEECE, BRISTOL

As almost every band will attest to enjoying the live experience no matter if it's in front of 10 or 10,000, it's always affirming to see this put into action. With a stage show and performance befitting much bigger stages, London's **DEFENCES** are an absolute joy. Their ambitious metalcore is still a bit rough around the edges and a bit too reliant on backing tracks, but they make up for it with overwhelming passion and personality. Having honed their craft as support in front of larger, often merciless crowds, it's little wonder that **THE RAVEN AGE** are so tight and professional on day one of the tour. The rhythm section in particular sound absolutely colossal as they power through a set dominated by their well-received second effort, *Conspiracy*, giving everything as if it was a triumphant victory lap rather than opening night in a half-full dingy Bristol club. Vocalist Matt James grows in stature as the set progresses, whether it's hitting the heights of the colossal-sounding *Surrogate* and *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, or donning an acoustic for *The Face That Launched A Thousand Ships*. Ultimately it's a testament to a young yet assuredly accomplished band revelling in the live experience.

ADAM REES

SOEN
GHOST IRIS/WHEEL
ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Clearly receiving signals from Tool's *Lateralus* album, Helskini prog metallers **WHEEL** lace their pulsing, bottom-end-heavy grooves with exploratory melodies to engaging effect. Amidst choreographed headbanging, the untamed roar of Danes **GHOST IRIS** occupies every available crack and crevice with powerful intent. Although enjoyably brutal, the quartet's unrelenting brand of metalcore takes too broad a detour from the overarching theme of the night, but it does violently underline the soft edges of brilliance beset across **SOEN**'s performance. Warm, dream-inducing melodies cascade into crescendos of grandeur, as the Swiss prog rockers mesmerise with highlights from latest album *Lotus*. A sharply dressed Joel Ekelöf commands with cool, effortless authority, enticing his audience to join in the rousing chorus of *Lascivious* before entrancing with the hypnotic serenity of *Martyr*'s hushed mid-section, which is met with an awestruck hush. With such boundless variety in colour and melody, Soen's lushly textured sense of adventure reaches epic heights by smoothly seductive degree, and indeed, it's impossible to disagree with Joel's statement that this is the best the band that has ever been.

LUKE MILNE

Scarlxrd: writing his xwn rules

SCARLXRD

ELECTROWERKZ, LONDON

UK's incendiary trap metal icon unites the tribes

IN THE BOWELS of a gritty London venue, worlds are colliding. Metallers in Gojira t-shirts, hip hop devotees in clompy boots and cyber punks wearing medical masks are milling around a small stage, over-stacked with lights. There's no support act. All eyes are locked on the backdrop, where a huge digital clock is counting down the minutes until Scarlxrd appears to launch his latest album, *Infinity*.

Over the last three years, the 24-year-old trap metaller has been prolific, releasing seven albums. He's built an eclectic fanbase who thrive off the brutal nature of his genre-mashing, and won admirers in high places, most notably Bring Me The Horizon, who've chosen him to play their curated date at All Points East festival in May. Tonight's show is being live-streamed on YouTube, where the rapper launched his career a few years ago, talking to the camera under the moniker Mazzi Maz. Those impossibly cheerful videos mucking about in his bedroom seem a world away from raw nihilism of Scarlxrd's music and the feverish response it inspires.

As the clock reaches the last 10 seconds, the atmosphere of anticipation is thick and the cramped space in front of the stage has become a battleground of bodies jostling for position. When Scar, accompanied by DJ Jacky P, finally bounds onstage for opener *NX PRESSURE* in a distorted fug of warped bass, the reaction is visceral and immediate. By second song *BERZERK*, a deranged headtrip of ruined guitars, fragmented beats and shredded screams that recalls both Slipknot and hardcore punk-rap crossbreeds Ho9909, it's all kicked off. Jacky P has abandoned the decks and is dangling from the pipework and ceiling insulation while Scar orchestrates the mosh below. He's is clearly an able rapper, switching between vengeful hail-of-bullets delivery and retching up hyper-aggressive shrieks on *CHXKE* and *STFU*. Yet he's heavily backing tracked and there are several occasions where he simply lets the track do the work for him, which feels like a cop-out. That being said, the crowd don't seem to care and Scarlxrd appears more interested in maintaining the energy than perfectly recreating his tracks live, an artist writing his own rules while carving a path through the noise.

DANNII LEIVERS

PIST.ON: WILL IRELAND/SCARLXRD: DEREK BREMNER

Mgła: the non-face of Polish black metal

MGŁA
LVCIFYRE/SOUL GRIP
UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Poland's other kvlt crossover band hit an hypnotic motherlode

IF YOU HAPPENED to catch Batushka when they hit the UK last year, the chances are that you'll have overheard some heated debates over who is the true face of, er, non-face-showing Polish black metal – Batushka being the scene-stealing relative newcomers, tonight's headliners considered the genuine article. Both bands have reached breakthrough status – **MGŁA** could have sold out a far bigger venue than the Underworld if they'd wanted – and it's a sign of their pulling power that the venue's already full for openers **SOUL GRIP**. Their depressive take on BM reaches epic, heart-scorching proportions as frontman Nathan Vander Vaet holds on to his mic like Ian Curtis back from the dead. If **LVCIFYRE** lose some mystique points by soundchecking in civvies in front of the crowd, the actual, spike-adorned barrage that follows allows no space beyond being totally immersed in the moment. Not so much songs as brutally efficient displays of power, this is death metal as sputtering gun turret, hurling fusillades of blastbeats through a miasmic whorl of riffs and parched chants to implacably and pretty much mystically arresting effect.

Somewhat disappointingly, Mgła's pre-set soundcheck reveals their faces, proving at the very least that they're not actually the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. But properly suited up in regulation leather jackets, hoods and mesh, there's a bleak power erupting through the uncomfortably packed venue that soon gets transfigured into something celebratory. A band who've kept genuine kvlt status while proving sonically accessible, at their heart is the same kind of gothic, 80s pulse that drives the twilight-journeying likes of Nachtmysium and Tribulation. Mgła weld it with both an otherworldly, atmospheric level of conviction and a gristly momentum that binds a sardine-packed crowd to states of rapt, reverberating wonder.

JONATHAN SELZER

MAMMOTH WEED WIZARD BASTARD
THE LEXINGTON, LONDON

Wrexham's **MAMMOTH WEED WIZARD BASTARD** rustle up a cosmic, doom-laden stoner storm that is much better than their ridiculous moniker would suggest. Their secret weapon is vocalist Jessica Ball; her ethereal, sultry vocals glide over the music, giving the band a hypnotic, intoxicating fusion that sounds like Chelsea Wolfe fronting Sleep. After a few minutes of warbling feedback, they hazily and heavily collide into the opening riff of *The Spaceships Of Ezekiel* from their career-best latest album, *Yn Ol I Annwyn*. The music is powerful but it's obvious that something is off, with Jessica showing visible frustration that The Lexington's PA can't handle their expansive, atom-smashing sound. Unfortunately, it's Jessica's vocals that suffer most, a barely perceptible soft murmur sunk in the vortex of swirling, sludge-textured riffs that peel out around her. Given that the technical issues are predominantly with vocals, it seems a wise move to launch into the instrumental *Katyusha*, although at 13 minutes in length, it does start to drag a little towards the end. MWWB are an excellent band, vastly superior to many of their stoner contemporaries, but tonight just simply isn't their night.

REMFRY DEDMAN

THE OCEAN
DOWNFALL OF GAIA/HEROD
MAMA ROUX'S, BIRMINGHAM

It's hard to imagine **HEROD** fitting in anywhere better than a venue decorated to look like a vibrant New Orleans street, their mix of Eyehategod-style sludge and Sabbathian doom mired in underground nastiness yet also proving transcendental. **DOWNFALL OF GAIA** are a visceral force to behold, their post-black metal assault reaching its full power when live and loud. That said, the band's backing tapes between songs let them down some, dipping to become little more than background noise rather than allowing seamless transition between songs. **THE OCEAN** suffer no such issues; the set is a flawless exercise in atmospherics and mystique, frontman Loïc Rossetti keeping the crowd on their toes when he unexpectedly leaps into their midst from atop a stack. For a band who shirk the prog tag, they execute a masterclass in the same kind of titanic soundscapes and performance that has made Gojira so beloved. In pulling off the anthemic *Silurian: Age Of Sea Scorpions* and crushing *Ectasian*, complete with guest snarlings from Herod's Mike Pilat alike, The Ocean are seemingly set on the same underground-breakout path as Opeth and Gojira before them.

RICH HOBSON

MGLA: KEVIN NIXON

OVERKILL
DESTRUCTION/ FLOTSAM AND JETSAM
ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON
Thrash veterans take no prisoners

A CELEBRATION OF thrash's still-seismic bedrock, it should come as no surprise that tonight has attracted an international horde of patched-up lifers. **FLOTSAM AND JETSAM**'s place in the history books might be overshadowed by having had a pre-Metallica Jason Newsted in their ranks, but they represent a crucial part of the scene's evolution – that moment when power metal's speed-driven roots were morphing into the taut, choppy sound that's always felt like a bracing against an imminent threat. You can hear that DNA in Erik AK's theatrical vocals, now seasoned to a resonant Bruce Dickinson-esque pitch, but the expansive nature of their sound is at the expense of the immediacy of their touring partners.

One day we might have anthems called Kill For Post-Hardcore or Electonically Tinged Melodic Metalcore Till Death that will stand the test of time, but until then we have **DESTRUCTION** and *Thrash Till Death* sending a room full of devotees into a frenzy as belligerent riffs hack at lead breaks like a deranged army rushing at barbed wire defences. German thrash was always the more barbarian-minded counterpart to the US wave, and frontman Schmier embodies a single-minded force of will that barrels though a set geared towards the classics. A closing *Bestial... INVASION!!!* rips through the wastelands amidst tensile, spidery riffs, piloted by an eyeball-popping mania you'd be hard-pressed to reproduce in the modern age.

As with tonight's openers, Bobby 'Blitz' Ellsworth's pressure-valve vocals also carry some early power metal pitch, but married to **OVERKILL**'s New York grit and punk edge, it's an irrepressible force. Amidst a set that hopscotches across the band's 39-year history, they offer fiery testament to a career whose consistency hasn't been so much comforting reliability as an ongoing, priapic thrill. Tonight also makes it clear what a consummate metal band they are. New track *Head Of A Pin* slows the tempo down to juggernaut level, showing off stunning musicianship in the process, foundational track *Feel The Fire* rides out on a Maiden-esque gallop, and a cover of Subhumans' *Fuck You* is another call-out to thrash's roots that makes more glorious mincemeat of the ages.

JONATHAN SELZER

Bobby 'Blitz' Ellsworth: irrepressible

OVERKILL: MARIE KORNER

FIVE MINUTES WITH ALICE COOPER

Rock's original shockmaster talks dodgy drugs, secret warehouses and keeping his emotions on lockdown

WORDS: ALI COOPER

What's the worst thing about being in a band?
"It's great talking to people in interviews, but when you get days of 22 interviews is when you start losing it; you can't say the same things again! When we were just breaking England, I'd be doing 20–25 interviews a day for 10 days in a row. When I meet young bands now who can't wait to make it, I tell them to be careful what they wish for because that's when the real work starts."

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
"I learned from observing others that the bigger the stars were, the nicer they were. Everybody I've ever met that I highly admired were the nicest people – The Beatles, Elvis Presley and Salvador Dalí. I always felt if I got to their level, the best thing to do is be yourself and be nice."

When was the first time you felt like a rock star?
"When you get on stage, you're not yourself anymore and you suddenly become a different character. When I developed the Alice character, people stopped me and said, 'You're that guy with the make-up and the snake! Can I get your picture?' People think it must get really old for me but I worry about the day when they *don't* want my picture."

What's been your worst experience on drugs?
"I was at a party in Detroit when THC was a big deal and everybody took these capsules of really uncut, strong stuff, so everyone passed out. I woke up at 3am and there were 40 bodies lying around me, it looked like Jonestown. I thought everybody was dead except me! It was the middle of winter, so I walked out in the snow for about two miles with just a shirt on to get myself back to being human again. By the time I got back, people were just starting to wake up. It was really terrifying!"

When was the last time you cried?
"I'm not emotional on that level, I'm too logical so I compartmentalise things. I can be sad, but it's very rare that I'll cry about it. The last time was probably when my dad passed away back in 1987."

How hard is it putting together a new Alice Cooper show every year?
"This is my favourite time of year because the props are being made right now and we're putting the pieces together like a jigsaw. We always write the finale first and work backwards; I know I have to do *No More Mr Nice Guy*, *Poison* and *School's Out*. That only gives me three to four songs where I have the luxury of doing something the audience aren't expecting – for example, *Steven* [the song named after the central character on *Welcome To My Nightmare]* is going to be on the tour this year!"

What's your character Steven up to now? Paying taxes?
"Steven is the little kid that's in everyone, he's an innocent mischief maker and he's fascinated with everything – he's a poltergeist. He's a kid but you never want him to grow up, so don't ever lose that inner child because they are very important to who you are. There's a part of Alice that really depends on that little trickster."

What happens to your theatrical props after they're used?
"The audience really looks forward to the guillotine and the straitjacket, but we try to change the props for every tour so people have to remind me of things we used before. We have a warehouse full of all the old stage props that we used over the years and I would not want to spend the night in there alone!"

What's your favourite song in your setlist?
"*Poison* is one of my favourite songs because people react to the scary songs or the anthems, but when you bring out *Poison*, which is fairly erotic, it's a total turnaround for Alice Cooper."

What's next for Alice Cooper?
"The new Hollywood Vampires album is coming out soon. I'm really happy with it because it's so different from anything I would do normally. What makes it great is I didn't do all the writing, everybody worked on it and the songs Johnny Depp and Tommy Henriksen wrote are so bizarre, but it's really hard."

"I WOKE UP WITH 40 BODIES AROUND ME"

ALICE COOPER IS TOURING THE UK THIS OCTOBER – SEE LIVE EVIL ON P.109 FOR DATES

PRESS/ROB FENN

KNOCKED LOOSE

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